
Mirai SMP

# Mirai SMP (SMP Live AU x Future Diary)

**youly**

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# please read

So I'm sure that you all know about what happened with Carson's stream and the whole drama with SMPronpa.

In case you don't, I will quickly summarise what happened:

SMPronpa was a fanfiction about a crossover between danganronpa and the smp live boys. It had gained a massive amount of popularity and eventually even some of the smp guys noticed. Carson made a stream about things he was uncomfortable with and just ranting about things the fandom / stans do, and at one point he called out smpronpa, basically stating how he was not comfortable with seeing he and his friends killing eachother.

Now I, of course, made this fanfiction way before Carson's stream. In fact, smpronpa was basically my INSPIRATION.

And as terrible and selfish as it sounds, I will still be continuing this series. I'm so sorry, but I've been planning this idea for so long and I put so much time and effort into this. Unless the smp boys are extremely uncomfortable with my story and I am forced to take it down, so be it. If that case comes, I will type out this story on a google doc and share the link with anybody who either still wants to read it, OR has not finished reading the series yet.

***also.. PLEASE KEEP THIS IN MIND!!:***

**This book is 100% FICTION! Under NO circumstances OR means do I wish for ANY of the events that take place in this series to happen to the real people IRL. This is simply just a fan fiction I have decided to make for fun, and for anybody who enjoys watching SMP live and anime!**

**The characters in this series have VERY exaggerated personalities and mindsets, and at this point they are just characters with similar traits to the actual SMP guys.**

**I do not wish to make anybody uncomfortable, and if you think you cannot handle the story then feel free to click off this series.**

*WARNING!! THIS FANFIC WILL CONTAIN...*

**- DEATH.**

**If you are uncomfortable with it, I am suggesting you should NOT READ THIS!!**

**- If you happen to be a member from SMP who is reading**

**this*, please don't.* seriously, *DON'T.***

**- This fanfiction will NOT have any ANGST / signs of DEPRESSION (e.g making the people cut themselves). Because that's messed up. (I know, says the one who is writing a fanfic of guys killing each other).**

**- There WILL be BROMANCE, but no NSFW or actual shipping. Though, you can ship the characters if you want, that's fine by me. But I do not want to intentionally make any ships canon because that would most likely get a lot of backlash.**

okay, I think that's all.

# !INFO!

Hello! Welcome to the start of my NEW series!! The characters will be focused mainly from the community SMP Live (+ some other MCYTers.)

It's heavilly based off the anime "**Mirai Nikki**" (Or "Future Diary" in english). If you haven't seen it, that's perfectly fine since this series will explain it.

If you have seen the anime, then you would know what it's about- however I am changing it up a bit to make it more interesting. Such as the ability to unlock a power once somebody has died (That is not canon to the anime), as well as adding other things too.

EDIT: I am also making a big twist at the end that will make it differentiate from the original mirai nikki ALOT

You will mainly see things through Technoblade's POV, as he is the main protagonist. But every now and then you may see things from other characters POV's too!

Here are the main characters included in the series:

➳ Technoblade (AKA Techno)
➳ Jschlatt
➳ CallMeCarson (AKA Carson)
➳ Wilbur Soot (AKA Wilbur)
➳ TedNivision (AKA Ted)
➳ ConnorEatsPants (AKA Connor)
➳ Sneegsnag
➳ Krinios (AKA Ryan)
➳ Altrive
➳ AntVenom (AKA Taylor)
➳ CaptainSparklez (AKA Jordan)
➳ Pokay (AKA Poke)
➳ Joko
➳ Traves (AKA Travis)
➳ Cscoop (AKA Cooper)
➳ God (Mystery character)

I will be releasing concept art designs of the characters on here sometime.

But for now, you may sit back, relax, and

***enjoy the show.***

if you have any questions ask in the comments.

# ➳ prologue: from me

**prologue ; from me**
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***TECHNOBLADE***

"I called you a few times but you're not picking up. . . So, um. I just wanted to let you know that you did good at work today. Make sure you come early again tomorrow and finish off your task with the surveillance."

A small beep pends at the end of the voice message as it finishes. A low groan slips out from between his lips; his eyes flutter shut momentarily, as his hand shoves his phone back into his pocket. He always forgets to turn off do-not-disturb when he's at work. What can he say, old habits die hard.

A refreshing wave of cool air blasting from the AC hits the surface of Technoblade's skin, pricking up the hairs on his arms with a gauze of goosebumps. Exhaustion and relief are the only two emotions he feels right now.

Being a hitman is hard.

Or at least, a hitman's assistant. He never liked to label himself as the "hitman's assistant" though, because it didn't really sound as cool. Despite him being good at his job — in fact, probably the best at his job — tracking down targets wasn't something that had made him feel proud, nor was it enjoyable.

It was all mostly sitting behind desks, filing out questionably legal paperwork, and occasionally sitting behind the security cameras guiding the missions. But never any assassinating, or cool car chases for that matter.

It all started when he was finishing a tennis match 2 years ago. After being followed home by two people dressed in black, who later on revealed themselves as special guards who work under a secret assassination organisation, he had managed to get a free position in the workforce. But everything that happened before those 2 years were extremely hazy in his memory; almost as if his new memories kicked out the old, replacing them.

Somehow, these agents had looked into his background prior, so it had been clear that he was being watched for some time. They asked him if he was up to joining them.

Of course, Techno was startled at first. And definitely had a *lot* of

questions.

*Alright, let me get this straight,* he had thought, *you've tracked me down for God knows how long, and now you want me to suddenly work as a hitman's assistant in your probably very illegal organisation? Are we just going to gloss over the fact that you've broken several laws here?*

But nonetheless, he accepted the offer anyway, because anything was better than working at McDonalds.

He had good pay, and he was able to make a living from working behind a desk. Every day, he would open his phone and type out what had happened in the business, making sure to log everything that went on throughout the day — specifically, information regarding their targets.

He's never seen the boss, ironic enough. In fact, nobody knows who the boss really is. For all he knows, the boss could be *anybody*. Or maybe they don't even *have* a boss.

He sighs, again.

Walking over to the couch, he sits down and opens his phone, reading the log he had taken today.

. . . . . .

【 *14/6/2000 TARGET #195* 】

*Location: Unknown*

*History: Appeared to be known to own a large sum of money. Unknown whether cash has been robbed or not. Last seen to be driving a custom silver Hennessey Venom GT, presumably escaping a car chase. Wanted dead or alive - reward will be 10K.*

*Daily log: Not much progress has been made today. Whereabouts on target continues to remain unknown, however we have concluded that 195 has ties to some of the previous victims, Target #120 and an unnamed specialist.*

. . . . . .

He sits there for a few minutes, observing the document. The gnawing growling of his stomach disrupts his concentration, as his body starts to crave for it's meal of the day — lunch. Usually his work would finish much later in the day, but today he finished a lot earlier.

Just as he is about to get up from his seat on the sofa, a small ping vibrates his phone. It's a new email.

"Surely not another scam," he mumbles, frowning. "I thought I blocked them from my inbox."

But to his luck, the email wasn't a scam. Nor was it from his boss, which takes away a chunk of anxiety already.

Curiosity beginning to suck him in like an addicting video game, he opens the email, and with each passing second his eyes grow wider:

. . . . . .

*Hello Technoblade,*

*Congratulations, you've been chosen to participate in the game we call Mirai SMP!*

*No, this isn't a scam mail! Yes, this is real! Woo hoo, something exciting to add to your boring life!*

*You, along with 14 other contestants, will be brought to a special arena right after you finish reading this email! More will be explained when you enter the stadium.*

*I wish you the best of luck.*

*From, me.*

. . . . . .

Before he can even take a second to comprehend what he had just read, something inside of him snaps; and before he knows it, he falls to the ground, engulfed gradually into the depths of unconsciousness.

# ➳ CHAPTER 1: god

**chapter 1 ; god**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Welcome all!"

His eyes snap open and he finds himself waking up in a large, grandiose hall, standing absentmindedly on a tall podium.

He looks around, and finds that there are also many people standing on a podium too. Each of these upstanding podiums are distributed clockwise in a circle; in the centre, is a symbol of a cathartic-seeming crown.

But most of all, above everything — is the looming, prestigious figure of a large, almost *inhuman* being. It's details and features are obscured by it's shadows — like a silhouette. The only thing differentiating itself from his black as soul body is the obnoxious mask tied around over his face. For the most part, it's a greyish-silver; with two big, black holes forming the eyes, and an eerily open mouth which Techno can only assume is a smile.

Suddenly, an echoing voice startles him from his observation. "Where am I?!" yells some boy on the podium. Dishevelled, blonde hair is covering the majority of his face, and he is wearing a plain white T-shirt. "And who are you? What is this place?!"

"Don't worry, Cooper," says the shadow God-like figure, "this is all a simulation in your head. In reality, you are merely just asleep, but I have linked all your drea—"

*"How do you know my name?!"*

He raises a fair question, in all honesty. Cooper's, at least that's what the figure called him, face contorts inarticulately, expressing a variety of enigmatic emotions; but Techno assumes the majority of his feelings are probably stemmed from fear.

Techno decides to keep quiet, watching the conversation from the sidelines; the last thing he'd want to do is start even *more* drama.

Ignoring Cooper, the Shadow man continued. "In case you have not picked it up already, I am God. Yeah, I'll give you a minute or two to let that sink in."

*So I was sorta right? He is a God,* he wonders, *but. . . this thing... has been what was ruling the world this entire time..?*

"Do not worry," God says a minute later, "I have no intention of killing you. In fact, I'm leaving that task up to you guys!"

Immediately, the atmosphere of the stadium-like arena around him tenses, becoming almost as dense as being underwater. Shock and confusion ripples throughout the hall like a tranquil lake being disturbed by a rock. Techno looks up at God, into his big, round eyes; the void in his pupils ever growing. But even despite his facetiously cheery tone of voice, he detects that there isn't the slightest hint of smile in his eyes. In fact, he seems. . . *almost tired.* Like simply just talking was a chore.

He continues. "Haha, yes I know, very funny, now shut up."

God folds his arms as the hall assents obediently. God clears his throat. "As you should know by now, there are 15 of you standing here. Why? Because you all have one thing in common: You always use your phones."

He pauses for dramatic effect, giving time for everybody to process that, too.

"Aaha, okay I'll elaborate." The vacancy in his void eyes do not waver. "Each of you log things down on your phones for a specific purpose. For this game, depending on what you use your phone for, it will give you a certain insight into the future."

He points to a tall boy with brown hair and a yellow turtleneck. "You, for instance, use your phone to write down song lyrics. So your future will be told in the form of a song! Fun, right? I thought that would be fun."

Yellow turtleneck gives a weird expression that Technoblade is unable to identify. Probably disgust.

"Okay, sorry, getting too off topic here," God scratches the back of his neck, "Anywho, you get the picture. Each of your phones will tell the future in one way or another. And the goal of this game, you wonder? Ha, glad you wondered! Because it's easy as pie. You must kill everybody until there's only one survivor! Haha, yep — 14 out of the 15 of you will die, simple as that!"

All at once, the wafting murmurs and fearful chatting pick up again; some people are frozen in disbelief, others have a more quick reaction — crying, yelling, outrage, ill. All the while, Technoblade finds his thoughts beginning to drift off into another dimension once again.

He feels blood rush to the tips of his fingers and head; trembling. He doesn't look down, but he can feel himself trembling.

He screws his eyes shut.

*This is all a dream. Right? It* ***has*** *to be a dream. It has to be.* ***This can't be real. None of this can be real.***

"No, this isn't a dream," God quickly says, reading his mind. "It's

real, all of it. Oh, and I almost forgot to mention, too: **Once you kill somebody, you will unlock a special ability.** This ability will relate to your characteristics especially. Like you."

He points to the yellow turtleneck again, who's probably grown sick of his bias already. "Your power will probably be heightened hearing, or something. I don't know I'm still thinking."

"What?" Is all turtleneck says.

God doesn't seem like a very organised game host.

"So," God says, ignoring the fear-stricken faces of the people around him, "any questions?"

Come to think of it, there was a question that had been in Technoblade's mind for some time. A question that had found itself wandering into his consciousness — a question that might determine the true purpose of this situation he's in.

He raises his hand, but instead, God chooses another contestant.

This other contestant is wearing a pink sweater, with the white collar of his tucked beneath undershirt sticking out. Curly, dark brown hair covered his eyes, and questionably real amber brown dog ears point up from his hair. He's shaking violently, looking worlds beyond terrified.

"Yes, Travis?" God casually inquires to the pink sweater boy, Travis.

He swallows. "Mr- uh- Mr God, sir. W-What's the... Meaning— of this..? Why are we k... K--k—... *killing each other?!"*

The masked God replies impulsively without hesitation.

"Because I'm bored. And being God is boring. I have been God for thousands of millenia, and I'm starting to grow tired of it. Besides, my assistants are incredibly dumb."

*Assistants?* Technoblade wonders, looking around. He doesn't see any 'assistants' anywhere. Assuming these assistans even exist.

"Next question? Oh yes, you!"

God points to Technoblade. He takes a deep breath. It's his turn now to have a say.

"Okay, *God*," he utters, tucking his hands into his pockets in an attempt to assuage his nervousness. "So why do you think you can just decide to put a bunch of random kids into a game? Surely, you'll give us a motive to actually participate?"

His eyes narrow as he stares into God's eyes; trying desperately to dig up any hint of real emotions behind his inarticulate hollow pupils. " What do *we gain* out of this? What do we get if we *win?"*

The masked God stops and thinks for a moment. There is no enthusiastic, "well I'm glad you asked!", or some annoyingly cheerful pre-thought of response. Just silence. The hall falls deaf as they await for his response.

A minute passes before God puts his hands together; and for the first time, there is not but a fake, cheerful smile on his face — but rather, the corners of his lips cure upwards in a cruel, stone-cold fashion. He swears he can see something wicked, shimmer vaguely from beyond his abyss-painted, hollow eyes.

"The winner," he grins maliciously, *"will become God."*

# ➳ CHAPTER 2: meet the players

**chapter 2 ; meet the players**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"God!?" somebody in a blue and black hood yells; the most noticeable feature on their hood is the large blue ace of spades symbol printed in the centre of it. "Are you fucking serious!? No way, this has to be some sick joke! *This is fucking sick!!"*

"Yeah!" yells a boy wearing a black eyepatch and beige pink surgical mask in agreement, "Spades here has a fuckin' point, ay? This is all just some sick scheme into manipulating us to murder each other! We're humans, not some toys for your sick-fuckin-ass to play with!"

"I can't kill a *person!! I can't even kill a fly!!*"

"This is insane, this is insane, this is insane!"

"You sick fuck! How could you do this?!"

"What are you guys talking about, if you ask me that's a great deal"

"If it's to be God..."

"God dammit, I don't stand a *chance!!"*

Technoblade opens his mouth to yell something, when suddenly he feels his throat tighten.

"Talking time is over," God snaps his fingers, and he realises that everybody else has fallen silent, too. "Before I let you off, I think it's time we get to know each of our opponents first, don't you agree?"

He summons a giant holographic screen, showing a simulation of a boy with brown hair and ram-like horns in a business suit.
"Number 15," is written above the picture in bold letters.

Technoblade looks to his side and sees that same boy. His podium was glowing brighter than the others.

"Player Number 15", God announces, "Schlatt, or 'Jschlatt'... And Mail Man. And Big Guy. And Parkour Prince, Bladez, PvP God, Logan from Big Time Rush, Tekkit man, Gay schlatt, Pokiman, Ladder man, New Guy, Terraria man, Hot gay man, Joe for Joe Rog — Okay, who the hell has this many names?"

Schlatt opens his mouth to speak but God continues.

"Anyways, moving on. 17 years old, and works as a CEO of some

sketchy aisle company. He's known to have a reputation for scamming employees with his ridiculous cryptocurrency. We all know nothing can beat Dogecoin, dumbass. Yeah, I don't know jack about businesses, but I do know yours sucks. I'd be careful of him, he's a manipulator at heart."

He can tell Jschlatt is unhappy, and so he unmutes him. He does this not because he wants to let him have his say, but because he is curious to see how he would respond.

"Okay, listen here you dirty fucking scumbag," the hot-headed man spits, "My cryptocurrency is fucking awesome, and I don't *scam people!!* There is an *incredible* difference between scamming people and selling taxed goods and services at a supplier's level of profitable price! I'm receiving tax revenue higher than total loss of surplus, *not 'scamming'*. It's basic economics, dumbass. Not that you'd know that, because I know more about business than you would ever know, you useless uneducated piece of shadowy-demon lying motherfucking shit! You're lucky you're an immortal God or otherwise I would have beat your fucking—"

He mutes him again.

"Jesus christ, you're annoying. I was gonna give you all a chance to say something after your introductions, but thanks to your tantrum I know I won't be making that same mistake again."

The hologram switches to another boy, also in a business suit. The 15th podium stops glowing, and instead 14 illuminates.

"Player #14 — Connor, AKA 'ConnorEatsPants'. 18 years old, and works alongside Jschlatt, as Co-Owner of their small... 'business', "Schlatt n Co". Not as cunning, sure as hell not as annoying, but nonetheless — he has the wits."

And he goes on, with more people showing on the simulation.

"Player Number 13 — Joko. Oh, you actually have an interesting backstory. But it will take too long to say — also, your girlfriend is doing fine, so don't worry. Long story short, Joko is 18 years old and works as a police officer in the FBI agency."

"Player Number 12— Travis, AKA SuperTraves. A 16 year old boy scout. Signed up to sell cookies but ended up learning about survival. But for the most part he's pretty useless. Seriously, did you even learn anything in scouts? It intrigues me to see how long you'll last, Travis."

*I'll bet he'll be the first to die* thinks Technoblade. *That, or he'll win.*

"Player Number 11— Cooper, AKA cscoop. 17 years old, and does skateboarding and stunts as both a part time job and hobby. According to this script, apparently you really *really* love skateboards. Like, *really*."

"Player Number 10— Altrive. 17 years old, and is studying a medical course to become a doctor. Not that it was his choice. His true lifelong dream is to someday blow away the world's mind. Big dream for a young kid."

"Player Number 9— Ryan, AKA "Krinios". 17 years old, and works after his father as an architect. Not that it was his choice, though. After all, if you just listened to your father, this wouldn't have gone missing, right?"

God points to his eye, implying something. Alec then notices an eyepatch covering Ryan's left eye. God resumes, glossing over Ryan's offended expression.

"Player Number 8— Jordan, AKA CaptainSparklez. 19 years old, and does racing for a living. He also knows everything about vehicles, from fixing cars to naming their specific brands. So, uh, if your car breaks down or something you can go to this guy."

Techno scoffs at the poorly executed joke. *And get run over? To hell with that.*

"Player Number 7— Taylor, AKA AntVenom. 19 years old and lives on his own in an apartment. He works as a part time job in a CD store, as well as being a DJ for parties and clubs."

"Player Number 6— Poke, AKA Pokay. 17 years old, and works as a... Pirate? He's a pirate? That's a job? Even I didn't know that. Well yarrr, a-hoy there me'arty. Welcome on board to a new journey, aha!"

"Player Number 5— Sneeg, AKA SneegSnag. 17 years old. Gambles for a living. He's known to be a pretty famous gambler in a few of the local bars."

"Player Number 4— Wilbur, AKA Wilbur Soot. 18 years old and writes his own music for a career (specifically a guitar, which by the way is played really well). Even I have to admit your music is good. Props to you Wilbur!"

"Player Number 3— Ted, AKA TedNivision. 17 years old and commentates games and events. Used to live on a farm and work as a dairy farmer. I don't know how you went from milking to commentating but I'm sure you figured out a way."

"Player Number 2— Carson, AKA CallMeCarson. Also 17 years old, and does stand up comedy as a comedian. Has performed at a number of popular restaurants, concerts, and bars!"

Finally, it was *his* turn. He feels his own anxiety start to arise in his gut, as the base of his own podium begins to light up.

"And finally, Player Number 1," God declares one last time, "— *Technoblade.* 17 years old. Honestly, probably the only one here with an actual shot at winning, as well as Joko. Works as a hitman, or actually, a 'hitmans assistant', but hitman sounds cooler."

All eyes turn to Technoblade, each stirred with various emotions of amusement, envy, curiosity, apprehension, and terror; every one of their expressions pangs and haunts him deep down, filling his lungs with a gnawing, anxious fear.

*'Probably the only one here with an actual shot at winning.'*

His heart pounds like a beating mallet in his chest. He only works as an assistant— a boring job which requires him to sit behind a desk the entire day. He doesn't know a single thing about being a proper hitman.

Does he really have a shot at winning?

*No,* he wanted to say, *no, you're wrong. I don't know anything.*

He knew that being told that you may be the person with the most advantage in a game will either result in two things:

1. People will avoid him in fear of being attacked

Or 2 . . . **People will target and eliminate him to prevent him from winning.**

He prays that it won't be the second one.

"Now that that's over with, there's also one more thing." God puts his hands together, rubbing them both in fake excitement once more. "I have ranked each of you out of 5 for Strength, Intelligence and Teamwork. I won't tell you, though, until a few days pass. Just to leave you all waiting in anticipation, hahaha! Wow, I AM evil! I should have been the devil instead!"

*That's not really the most settling thing you could have said.*

He quickly 'unmutes' the 15 people, and everybody gasps as the straining weight of their choke-hold releases.

" — ass!" Schlatt yells.

God grins again, watching as the relief of being able to breathe again eventually dissipates into sparking another argument amongst one another. As people yell, cry, and argue, Techno finds his eyes wandering over to the police boy — Joko. The other contestant who 'supposedly' had an upper advantage too.

He's a boy his height wearing a green mask; his hair is light blonde, dyed pink at the ends. He jumps back a little, noticing that the blonde is glaring directly at him, even despite his eyes being obscured by the shadows.

God speaks again, as the talking represses.

"I think that's all to say," he raises a hand and points up, "once you wake up back in the real world, the game begins. You may either run, hide or hunt. I mean, you can continue about your day too but that's not a really smart idea. Your time limit is two months, and remember; your phones will tell you the future! This will be very helpful to your experience!"

He claps his hands and Techno's vision goes black once again.
He feels the world around him spinning in different directions.

# ➳ CHAPTER 3: game begins now

**chapter 3 ; the game begins now**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

His eyes snap open, and he finds himself lying dead on the floor.

". . . Was that a dream?" he subconsciously murmurs to himself out loud.

Everything in the house seems to be perfectly normal — was he just tired from work today so he took a nap?

*... In the middle of the floor.*

Yeah, something didn't seem right.

He hears his phone buzz from the armrest on the couch. Getting up, he stumbles over to the device and pushes it off into the sofa's cushion. He turns on his phone. In big, bold, red letters, the words flash fleetingly on the completely white screen:

**THE GAME BEGINS NOW**

He feels his own eyes grow wide at the words. In disbelief, he rubs them, praying that he'd just gone crazy; rubbing them as if he would suddenly wake up from this terrible nightmare he's been having, like in the movies.

But when he opens his eyes again, nothing changes. Somehow, he anticipated this result.

*So this isn't a dream.*

It's real. Everything *is real.*

He feels his heartbeat quicken, as beads of sweat become visible in his palms. This race to become God is *actually real.* There are going to be *real people* coming after him. Real people chasing him down to *murder him.* God said it himself — a 14/15 chance of dying. What are the odds he'll survive that?

How he wishes that those stalkers offered him the position of a *real* hitman instead — now that would have been more tactical.

The first thought that comes to his mind is his contacts. He needs

to get a hold of his colleagues — or manager — or *anyone.* He just needs to tell someone this.

He presses the home button in an attempt to exit out the white screen he was on. His fingers go straight to the email app — well, where was once the email app, anyway. He notices that everything is erased. There are only two apps — phone, and notes. But all his contacts are deleted. He can't even call any emergency lines, like the Police or Ambulance.

Techno decides the best thing to do is to get prepared. He won't be able to live a normal life anymore — from now on, he'll be a fugitive, always on the run. He shoves the phone in his pocket and runs up the flight of stairs to his bedroom.

Swinging open the doors to his room, he rushes inside, turning the place upside down as he tries to desperately look for his bag — he rips open the cupboards, tears down the items on his shelf, kicks over the basket of untouched 2-week old laundry, until finally—

"There!"

Underneath his bed, tucked at the very back against the wall, is his backpack.

With jittery hands, he reaches out and grabs it, pulling it out from under the bed as he shakes out all of its contents. Out falls a jacket, a few opened tins of mints, ripped books, and pencil shavings. And a few tissues.

He pauses, thinking to himself as he allows his mind to be consumed by his survival instincts. The clock is ticking, and he can't afford to waste any time. Someone could be on his tail right now and he wouldn't even know it.

But at the same time, he also can't be *too* rushed, otherwise he might forget to pack something important. This will be the last time he'll ever see his house again, after all.

"Uh, what do I need..?" he mutters to himself, "uhh... Food.. Clothes.. My phone, obviously.. Uh... oh yeah, probably weapons."

He stuffs a spare shirt, underwear, and shorts. Slinging the bag on his back, he races to a room beside him — a special room that is used to store weapons for his job. It was compulsory for everybody in the company to own a weapon of some sort.

He sighs in relief as he finds his pistol still stored in a safe. He chucks the handgun in his bag, along with some spare bullets and a pocket knife.

He runs downstairs to the kitchen and finds whatever he can to fit into his bag. Canned beans, a kitchen knife, bags of chips, crackers, a few apples, and other random crap that'll probably last him a week. And lots of bottles of water.

Pulling out the phone, he checks to see if there are any updates.

None.

"Phew," he sighs, and then the question hits him:

What now? Does he hunt, or stay low? He knows he has to escape, but *where?*

Theoretically speaking, hunting at the beginning of the game *would* give him an advantage, for a number of factors, but at the same time it's also incredibly risky. Without knowing the skill levels of the other opponents, who knows what Techno would be up against.

But the major morally-challenging question remains glued to him: would he even be able to bring himself to murder a living *human being*?

He was somebody who worked with death for a while, but being the cause of it was never really something he could see himself doing.

*Hide. That's what I'll do. I'll hide and run. It's the safest option.*

He swings his backpack over his shoulder and hides his pocket knife and phone in his pocket. Then, he steps out the door to that magical world you would call "outside".

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The wind pounds into his face like a hammer as he sprints down the streets of his town. He feels his own heart race inside his chest, pounding in the inside of his ribcage. This is the first time Techno's ever actually ran this hard in a while.

Suddenly, he hears a *BUZZ* sound come from his phone. That must be it — his first message. He slows down, cautiously taking his phone from his pocket and turning it on.

*YOUR FUTURE WILL BE TOLD IN THE FORM OF:*

***VICTIM'S STATISTICS***

"My victim?" he hears himself gasp at the word. He remembers that earlier that day, he was just logging his victim for work. Of course, it's what God said. Whatever he used his phone for will be how his future is told.

Another buzz.

*PLAYER #6 IS HUNTING YOU DOWN FOR THE FIRST KILL.*

*LOCATION: APPROX. 10KM AWAY.*

*TRAVELLING FAST ON A MOTORBIKE.*

*60% CHANCE THEY ARE ALLIED. THEY ARE UNDERPREPARED.*

Panic arises in his chest as he reads his worst nightmare on his phone. He feels his heart rate quicken, and this time it's not from running.

As if put under some sort of spell, he can't stop looking at his

screen — and the more he reads those few words, the more he wished everything was just some dream.

*Oh my god. Oh my god. Oh my god. Calm down Techno, calm down. You can't fight acting like this. Get your head in the game, you fucking moron!*

He grips his phone tightly in his hands, screwing his eyes shut as he tries to steady his hitched breathing. Number 6. . . they were underprepared, right? So technically speaking, he *would* be able to take them down easy. Right?

. . . No, what was he thinking? Was he really planning on killing somebody just now?

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

His eyes snap open once again, and he finally puts his phone back in his pocket. Kicking off once again, he runs — to where? He doesn't know. There's no way he can outrun the guy — he's using a motorbike. Maybe he just has to pray that he'll forget about fighting him, or change his mind.

Sprinting past stores, markets, and various other buildings, he tries his best to keep his breathing pace steady. Panicking will only slow him down.

He pushes past the people in his way, as they all give him the same robotic, disgusted expressions. It amazes him, really, how these people have no idea what's happening. How they don't know their own God is some crazy masochist freak, or the fact that he has a 1 in 15 chance of replacing him. They have completely no idea. In a sense, he envies their obliviousness. But at the same time, it outrages him all the more.

Somebody is trying kill him. *Kill him!* Somebody's on his tail right now, probably planning on running over him with a motorbike! Dammit, he should've known that he would be targeted first.

Suddenly, a brilliant idea sparks into his mind.

*Of course, these people around me — I could use them for my advantage. I could ask them for help. God never said help from the outside world wasn't allowed.*

Seeing a wandering individual from the corner of his eye, he runs over to them, grabbing their shoulder as he shoots them an urgent glare.

"Help me, please help me!" Techno begs to a person walking by, already feeling humiliated he'd end up stooping this low to beg some stranger for help. Knowing full well he probably sounds insane, he continues, because he can't afford to lose any more opportunities. "S-Somebody is trying to kill me! Please, I know this might sound crazy but if I could just quickly borrow your phone, and maybe call the police or something—"

The person shoves him away with a brute force. "What the hell are you doing? Get out of my face, weirdo."

Techno stumbles back from the repelled push. He feels his entire heart shatter into a million pieces as his plan backfires on him. He turns around and watches the people go about their day without a care in the world of his new, future-blood-bath life.

"Can somebody help me? Please!" he calls out again, to anybody. "Please! I just need to call the police! Somebody is trying to kill me! Please, can somebody..."

His voice trails off as he comes to realise the grave truth.

Nobody cares.

He truly is all alone in this new world.

Wiping his eyes, he accelerates off into another sprint, this time running faster than he was before. He feels his throat strain raw, almost catching on fire; his heart beating in his neck as he races down the maze of footpaths.

*BUZZ.*

He rips out his phone, watching as the screen lights up.

*PLAYER NUMBER 6 IS NEARBY.*

*700M AWAY.*

Aware of the message, this time he doesn't allow himself to panic nor slow down. Instead, he nods solemnly to himself, continuing his pace. He supposes he's getting used to these messages.

As high powered adrenaline pumps through his veins like a machine, he dodges obstacles and people, running swiftly as the wind carries him forward.

*500M AWAY.*

Yeah, there's no way he can outrun them. Hiding is his only choice now. He has to look for a spot to hide.

He just has to hope that 6 doesn't have a diary that can give them the location of his hideout.

Techno sees a small hidden alleyway between two stores on the street. If he could hide in there and wait them out, maybe he'll be able to survive without getting his hands dirty.

Without hesitation, he cuts off from the pathway and into the abandoned alleyway. Pools of sweat are already pouring down from his forehead, dripping onto his screen as he checks his phone once again for any new updates.

There is.

*PLAYER NUMBER 6 IS 100M AWAY.*

*THEY ARE ALLIED WITH PLAYER NUMBER 5.*

*BUT THEY ARE ALONE.*

At the end of the alleyway is a dead end, with a pile of thrown out and worn away boxes. Slowing down, he skids along the paving

floor, collapsing down just behind the stacks of boxes at the end of the alley. Re-gaining his position, he scoots to a squatting format. He grips his knees to his chest and waits in dread.

*PLAYER NUMBER 6 IS 50M AWAY.*

His head starts to pound, as fear gnaws his tangled insides. He looks down at his hand, seeing how violently it's shaking; in an attempt to try to slow down his breathing, he tries to count how many veins he can see pulsing in his wrist.

A long minute passes before he's finally able to somewhat relax himself. He looks up, holding his breath, and notices a small crevice between the stacks of boxes he's hiding behind — peeking through, the other side to the entrance of the abandoned alleyway reveals itself. He prays to the cruel God that 6 will pass the alleyway.

There's another buzz. He doesn't want to look, but he does.

*PLAYER NUMBER 6 IS 20M AWAY.*

His breath gives out.

*PLAYER NUMBER 6 IS 10M AWAY.*

A fleeting sensation of terror flickers across his crimson, wide eyes.

His heart stops.

A person is standing at the end of the alleyway holding a knife in their hand.

# ➳ CHAPTER 4: DEAD END

**chapter 4 ; DEAD END**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

There, exactly 10 meters ahead of him, stands a black-haired man holding a knife in his hand.

He has a light beige-pink surgical mask with a green tank top over a purple long sleeved shirt. A black eyepatch covers the left side of his well-defined face; blocks of the alleyways shadows checker over him, obscuring most of his face as he stands cloaked in the shadows.

But even underneath those shadows, he can see — the bloodthirsty, ferocious sensation in his pure silver orbs. No, this isn't the look of competitiveness — this look is a look of hostility he's never seen before. It's something different — something craving for blood. Something...

*Something inhumane.*

*The pirate guy,* he suddenly remembers, *Pokay, was his name? Or Poke?*

"Oi, fuckface!" 6 yells out in his thick accent again, throwing his knife up from his left hand and catching it in his right. "I know you're hiding here! My phone told me so."

*Hold on a second. . . isn't this the same guy who said not even a whole hour ago that this game was a sick scheme?*

Still grasping onto the hopes that maybe he read his diary wrong, and he'd actually walk away, just like those villains in the horror movies would do, Techno doesn't say a word. He refuses to give up his hiding spot.

6 begins to slowly creep closer.

He can hear his footsteps slow down.

"Think you're smart or some shit, little fella?" He laughs out mockingly. "Hiding behind those old boxes there in the corner? I really hope my diary's wrong, 'cus I can't even bring myself to believe you'd hide there! Only a complete idiot would do that, hahaha!"

*Well shit.*

*I'm fucked. I'm fucked and there's no way I can get out of this. There's no way I can. . .*

*. . . No, stop.*

*There **is** a way I can get out of this.*
***I have to fight him.***

He closes his eyes one more time, sucking in a deep breath of air, as he devises a plan on the spot. He stands up.

"Okay, you got me, 6," Techno raises his hands and walks out of hiding, seeing the killer face to face.

" 'Course I got you, 1," 6 replies, his lips curling upwards in self-congratulation. The smug look in his hostile eyes only grow more distinct. "Huntin' shit is practically my job. I'm a certified pirate. Hiding from me woulda been no use, 'cus my diary tells my victims their exact location and whereabouts. And you, this so called 'strongest player', just happened to live right around the corner."

Another ridiculing chortle slithers out through his lips again, and he eyes Techno's figure up and down. "Strongest player my ass. You don't look like much of a hitman, ey? Takin' you on'll be a piece of cake."

He gestures his hand over at his slim build.

" . . and you could do for some of that," he adds, snickering at his own joke.

The contemptuous grin on his face grows wider as he speaks, revealing a set of murky yellow teeth. Flicking the dagger around in his hand, he throws it up and catches it once again. Techno winces.

6 takes another taunting step closer as he smirks. "You chose the wrong day to be a hitman, buddy."

"Well," he starts, "hitman's *assistant,* techni—"

Suddenly, at perfect timing, Techno hears his phone vibrate in his pocket. Crap, another one? At *this* time?

6 seems to take notice of this, too. But instead of telling him to keep his hands away from his phone, he does the opposite.

"Well?" is all he asks. Technoblade swallows.

"You're letting me read it?" he asks him hoarsely.

6 shrugs. "You're gonna die anyway. Might as well let ya take one last look at your phone before you'll never see it again, aye?"

He frowns, but complies anyway. Whatever his phone might tell him could change his entire fate. Maybe it'll tell him how to escape, or 6's weakness. Maybe it could—

Oh.

***POKAY — AKA "GAY SLUT"***
*BORN ON JUNE 11TH IN THE U.S*
*OWNS 7 AXES CALLED "ASSPENIS" IN HIS MISSIONS OF PLUNDERING PIRATE SHIPS. ASSPENIS 7 WAS THE STRONGEST.*
*WITH HIM ABOARD HIS SHIP WAS HIS YOUNGER SISTER. ONKY. SHE WAS THE ONLY THING KEEPING HIM SANE FROM BEING ON THE SHIP FOR SO LONG.*

*ONKY HAD BEEN KILLED THREE YEARS AGO.*

*THIS LED POKE TO STOP PURSUING HIS FUTURE AS A PLUNDERER, AND QUIT BEING A PIRATE FOR GOOD. HE QUIT VIOLENCE FOR HIS SISTER'S SAKE.*

*HE SPENT THE NEXT FEW YEARS DEPRESSED AND ALONE, DRINKING AT BARS TO COPE WITH HIS SISTER'S DEATH. HE MET SNEEGSNAG ON HIS JOURNEY TO OVERCOMING HIS LOSS.*

*POKE LOVES HIS SISTER.*

*SNEEG IS POKE'S FRIEND.*

***POKAY WILL DO ANYTHING T NOT LET THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO HIM DIE THIS TIME.***

His mind goes blank.

Why is his diary telling him this? Of all things? Why not something actually useful?

"So?" 6 — or, Poke — insists. "What does it say? Run away? Like a fuckin' eejit?"

"No." Techno responds curtly, slipping his phone back into his pocket. "It didn't tell me anything useful."

*Apart from the fact that you have 7 axes with the same name.*

Unconvinced at the mendacious response, Poke shoots Techno a belligerent, snarky glare. His posture; his stance; his eyes. Everything about him exudes confidence — as if he knows exactly what he's doing.

Techno only wishes he could feel the same way.

"Oi, earth to hit-boy?" Poke waves, approaching closer, "what are you, a fuckin' fish? Stop gaping like one and say something."

He snaps out of it, quickly re-merging himself back into reality. "Um. I like your jacket."

Poke lets out another snarl. "You're pathetic."

Impulsively, the second he finishes, Poke throws his hand back, before swinging the dagger at Techno's direction in full throttle. He jumps back, watching as the weapon soars through the air, skimming just past his left cheek.

6 lets out another echoing chortle, before whipping out another

hidden dagger from his sheath, charging him at full speed. He raises his hand back again, readying his aim as he catapults the knife at Techno once again.

*Craaapp, think fast!*

Regaining his balance shortly after, Technoblade effortlessly jerks his body to the side, dodging the close attack. Without thinking, as 6 charges at him, he grabs his wrist in a sore attempt to yank him out of balance. 6 shows no sign of losing his bearing, and instead he coordinately falls across the concrete floor, rolling behind Techno and sprouting back up again to launch another attack.

"Shit!" Techno finds himself uttering out, as 6 whips out another blade and aims it at his throat. Deflecting the manoeuvre, Techno quickly reacts by ducking his head, barely missing the tip of the blade by a hair. As he does so, he elbows 6 in the chest, and with his other hand he tries to pull his knife away.

"Shit is right," 6 grunts, his grip on his knife twisting as he jabs it into Techno's hand. He slices the surface of the skin in half, tearing through to the first layer of his hand's flesh, before sending a forceful blow to his ribs.

As 6's knee comes in contact with the space just below Techno's ribcage, he stumbles further back, spluttering as bloody saliva sprays from his mouth. Doubling-over, he feels the tip of 6's blade slice across the back of his legs.

Technoblade shrieks out, feeling the damp and warm blood bleed through his pants as they seep from his slit calves. He spins around, fatigued, throwing a weak fist into his face. To his surprise, he ends up punching him perfectly right in the nose.

This makes 6 blurt out an agonized yell, which brings Techno more time to perform more blows. He grabs his hand again, twisting it as he coils his fingers around the grip of the bloodied knife. He did it — he managed to grab 6's weapon.

Techno then kicks him to the ground, kneeling on top of him as he strengthens his grip around the knife with two hands. He raises the knife up high, and without thinking he brings it down to just above his chest; 6's hands grab onto his as he does so, preventing the knife from being pushed any further.

"No!" 6 yells out, writhing. "No! I don't want to die! Please! I need to be God!!"

"You expect me to let you live?" he spits back. It's his turn to sound condescending, now. "After you were the one who tried to kill me?"

"No, you don't get it, I need to be God!" 6's begs echo through the air as he pleads with urgency and desperation. "*I need to be God!!* You don't understand a fucking thing, asshat! You don't know how

badly I need to win! **You don't know anything about me!**"

*'You don't know anything about me.'*

The phrase replays itself over and over again inside his mind, as he's reminded of the diary entry.

*I don't know anything about him?*

And just then, the thoughts that were flitting idly along his consciousness all come to a halt; his eyes flicker ephemerally, as another idea sparks in his mind. This time, he's convinced it won't backfire.

*I know everything about you, Poke.*

"Poke. The 'Gay Slut'," Techno breathes out, his eyes trailing away from Poke's, as his vacant eyes hovering away into an empty space as if he's reciting an ancient poem. "June 11th was the day the U.S became your home."

Poke doesn't weaken his grip, but his mean expression eases a little, and he looks more confused than mad.

His eyebrows raise. "... *what?"*

He doesn't know if this will really work, but he sees it's stopped Poke's thrashing. He looks deep into his chafed, amber iris', trying to create some sort of connection between his words and the person he could see behind those eyes. His mind races to try to formulate the words.

"You grew up as a pirate, plundering ships and setting sail to the seas with your sister Onky," he presses on, paying attention to even the slightest of movement changes in Poke. He doesn't move. "You even named 7 of your axes 'Ass Penis', for some stupid reason. Life as a pirate was actually working out for you. . ."

His gaze locks in with his; unwavering, he sees Poke's eyes fleet with a wave of guilt. Cages of repression torment his regret from behind those eyes. He looks like he's fighting back the urge to say something. Techno can see that now.

*"Until three years ago."*

For 6's sake, he doesn't elaborate.

Poke's face contorts — he's terrified, now. "Who . . . *who the hell are you?"*

Techno doesn't realise how hard he's staring at him until now. His intensity assuages, as he softens his voice. "That's why you quit being a pirate. It was all for Onky."

His face ashens, as tears threaten to brim around the edges of his glassy eyes. Poke's hand slips from the knife hovering over his chest. "Stop it, stop talking."

*It's working.* Maybe he won't have to fight him after all.

*"And now, you have Sneeg.* No, you *only* have Sneeg. He was the only one really there for you when you lost what was most important to you. He saved your life, when there was no one else to."

Poke's breath hitches, not looking away from Techno. Bleary-eyed, his lower lip trembles ever so slightly as he's touched by the shades of melancholy. Techno feels his grip around the dagger loosen, and he raises it just by a little, moving it away from his chest.

He can see he's scared. But not for the reason he's meant to be.

"You're scared the same thing that happened to her will happen to him," he finishes. This makes Poke finally break.

A solemn tear trickles down Poke's cheek. His voice cracks in inflection. "I couldn't save her."

That's when Techno realises.

*He wants to become God so he can bring his sister back.*

"That's why..." he cries out between choking intervals, "I have to. . . *I have to kill you."*

"She's still here." Techno elicits, desperate for his plan to work. His hold on the knife tightens again. "She's with you, right now. She's proud of you, Poke."

He bites his lip, stifling back a sob. Techno's eyes narrow as he urges on.

"Pokay, listen to me. Is this what Onky would have wanted? Would she have wanted you to become like this? To become a murderer?" In a way, he's questioning himself when he asks him this.

He shakes his head slowly, and a few nervous beats of silence drag on before he finally answers. "No. No, she wouldn't."

He hears his phone buzz in his pocket, but he doesn't check. Poke's phone also pings.

For the first time in this game, Techno finds himself feeling *sorry* for him. Yeah, he tried to kill him. But what else could he have done? If he had a sister who died and was given the chance to be able to potentially bring her back, he would take it.

"I'm so sorry." Techno whispers, dumbfounded as the reality of the truth dawns over him. A wave of guilt and compassion flushes over him.

Poke's human, too. Just like him. He isn't the monster — it's this *game* that is. This game turned him into one, and it won't be long until it turns everyone into one, too. This is all God's fault. God did this. God is a monster.

*I'll bring her back for you. If I ever become God, I swear I will do it. I'll bring your sister back, and I'll bring you back too.*

"Who the fuck are you?!" yells a foreign voice, snapping Techno away from his thoughts. He looks up and sees a boy around his age wearing a hood with —

*Ace of spades.*

*Sneeg? It must be—*

Followed shortly after the shout, is the horrendous noise of a bullet tearing through the air; the vibrations of the gunshot rings in his ears, deafening him momentarily as a shockwave surges up through his veins.

The nerves in his arm shatter awake, reinforcing his grip on the knife even harder as his arms extend out. He throws his head forward in hopes he's dodging wherever the bullet hits, and—

*CRACK!*

Sneeg screams.

Poke screams.

Techno looks down.

His hands are covered in blood.

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Out of complete shock, he had unconsciously found himself jabbing the knife straight into Poke's chest. Fresh, flowing blood begins to engulf itself around the blade, as it pours out of his wound like a stream from a running river.

"...Oh my god," he gags, releasing his hands. "P—Poke! Poke! Oh no, shit, shit, oh my god!! I didn't— "

He pulls out the knife and throws it to the other side of the alleyway. The blade makes an ear-piercing, grating screech as it scrapes along the concrete.

*"POKE!"* the boy with the Spades hood — presumably Sneeg — shrieks out from the other end of the alleyway. He drops the pistol he was holding in his left hand, and runs to his friend's bloodied body. He swings a forceful fist in Techno's face as he runs over, which sends him falling back.

*"What the fuck is wrong with you?!"* he screams out at him, as venomous saliva sprays from his lips.

"I- I didn't—" Techno starts, shaking uncontrollably, "It— It was an accident, I didn't mean—"

*"Shut the fuck up!!"* Sneeg snaps back. "How can you accidentally kill somebody, you stupid fuck?! Was this your plan all along? To use his own fucking trauma against him and kill him?"

*How... much did he hear?*

Sneeg falls to his knees, grabbing Poke's shoulders as he tries to shake him awake. But it's no use, he's already lost too much blood by now. The wound was a fatal attack straight to the heart.

He's dead.

After realising this, Sneeg lets go of him. He jerks his head over to Techno, diverting his full attention over to the boy. As his eyes dart over to meet his, Techno can sense nothing but pure, ferocious hostility raging aflame in his eyes.

"I'm going to fucking kill you!" he shrieks, with bloodshot and tear-rimmed eyes. He grabs Techno by the collar of his shirt, throwing another fist back and lurching it right into his cheekbone. The grotesque vibration of a crack erupts from Techno's jaw, making him seethe in pain as blood drips down from his lips.

"Do you hear me?!" Sneeg booms again, throwing him to the floor. As he lands abruptly on his spine, he feels the wind get knocked out of his lungs. Terror assaults Technoblade as his body grows numb with pain. Sneeg doesn't hesitate to throw a sickenly fierce kick right under his chin, bruising and bleeding out a couple layers of his skin. "I won't let you get out of here alive if it's the last fucking thing I—"

The sound of his body collapsing to the floor stops him from finishing his sentence.

Before Techno can even dare to process what happened, the same thing happens to him.

# 【 GOD ENCOUNTER #2 】

**GOD ENCOUNTER #2**

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**THE CURRENT CHART:**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Yo how's it going guys!? Great to see you again, I really missed you all. It's been... What, about 45 minutes? Woah, time flies by fast!"

Techno groans as he unfortunately recognises the annoying voice. He blinks, unsurprised to see himself standing on the same podium in the grandiose hall he had stood on before. The first thing he notices is that he's not feeling any pain. He brushes his hand over his jaw — he can feel the graze there. It seems like you're numb to pain in this alternate reality.

He takes a look around at the familiar location. Encircling the cryptic symbol in the centre of the hall, are all 15 podiums.

Everybody is on their podiums.

Everybody except for Poke. Number 6. The man he had killed with his bare hands.

God is sitting on a floating chair in front of a large TV screen. He cackles wickedly and jumps down from it, looking at all 14 of the players.

"Jeeeez, talk about getting hasty, eh?" he chuckles, and while he can't see it, he can tell he's grinning helplessly from behind his mask. "I didn't expect our first kill to happen so soon. That's fuckin' amazing!"

"*Amazing?!"* Sneeg yells at him from his podium. When he catches Techno's eye, Sneeg shoots him a furious death stare. He zips his finger from one side of his neck to the other, the words 'I WILL KILL YOU' written in bold across his face.

God ignores him and claps. "Let us acknowledge our first kill of the game! As you all must have heard, your phones should have revealed who got killed, and who he was killed by!"

There are a few fearful nods. Is that what Techno's phone had buzzed about earlier? He fears to check.

"Lucky Number 6 — Poke. Brutally stabbed by our very own junior hitman, Number 1— Technoblade. Poor guy, being the first one to hit a DEAD END sucks!"

"I didn't kill him!" Techno shouts, painfully self-aware of how pathetic that sounds.

"Are you fucking insane?" Sneeg hisses in disbelief. "Or did you just forget that you, I don't know, fucking stabbed a man just a few seconds ago?"

God nods in agreement. "He raises a point. Who was the one that stabbed him?"

Techno goes silent.

"Yeah, exactly."

God cracks his neck, before snapping his fingers to silence everybody once again. "Uhh, what else was I gonna say...? Oh yeah, like I mentioned earlier, as soon as you kill somebody, you unlock a special power. I also forgot to mention that you can only use your power once; so make it count!"

A power? Oh, that's right. He's the first one to unlock this power.

"Your stats will be revealed after this short meet-up," he goes on. "From here on out, you are able to see the other players' skill levels on your phone. By now, all of you should know how your phone tells your future. "

The majority of the people nod.

"I've also decided to add a Special Power," God announces again. "The special power will be unlocked by a completely random diary user once they die. This special power is the ability to revive — either revive somebody else in your place, or revive yourself. Oh, and one last thing. When you're about to die, your phone will tell you that you've received a DEAD END. Once you get that message, the game's practically over for you."

God smiles to himself from under his mask and summons a couch for him to lie down on. He snaps his fingers.

"OK, bye losers."

# ➳ CHAPTER 6 : triple 5

**chapter 6 ; triple 5**

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***DIARY USER 13***

It's been 5 days since the first death of the game. Nobody else has died since then.

Being trained as a COP in the police force had actually helped a lot in mentally preparing himself for this game. Technically speaking, he can go out and hunt for kills right now if he wanted to. He'd be outmatched on the higher end against most of his opponents. Taking the crown would be easy.

He's been playing with lives his whole life; playing a game of life or death is something he's been trained to take on.

. . . Which is why that makes this game all the more careful to play.

So instead of getting hasty, he had decided to collect resources during those few days of cooldown. Collecting weapons, ammo, food, money, and other crucial resources essential to surviving — up until now, he is finally prepared.

He sits against a tree in a foreign park, staring idly at his phone screen, awaiting for any new messages.

There isn't.

Bored, he presses the home button on his phone, but suddenly a new app appears on the homepage that catches his eye.

'STATS'

*Huh,* he ponders, *I don't think that was there before.*

He taps on the icon, and suddenly that STATS list God promised appears on the screen.

***USER 1:***

***STRENGTH: 5/5***

***INTELLIGENCE: 3/5***

***TEAMWORK: 1/5***

***USER 6:***

*STRENGTH: 4/5*

*INTELLIGENCE: 2/5*

*TEAMWORK: 3/5*

"5/5 strength, huh?" he says to himself, smirking. "Maybe that Techno guy's not that much of a wimp as I thought."

He scrolls down, and sees his statistics there, too.

***USER 13 (YOU / JOKO):***

*STRENGTH: 5/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 5/5*
*TEAMWORK: 5/5*

"Check it out," the smirk on his face grows cockier by the second. "Triple 5, baby! Grindin' hours."

Those are the only stats on his screen. He assumes that the other player's stats are revealed once they either die, or kill somebody.

Just then, conveniently, his phone buzzes for the first time in 5 days.

***PLAYERS NUMBER 2 & 3*** *ARE HIDING AT A NEARBY AND LARGE OPEN FIELD. NO SIGNS OF HOSTILITY.*

*SUGGESTED FORM OF PUNISHMENT: GRENADING.*

"Explosives...?" he puts a finger to his chin, musing at the daunting message. Grenading is a bit extreme, isn't it?

As a now former COP, Joko had taken notes on all the criminals and victims he encountered. Now while this wasn't really a part of his job, sometimes he'd write down his own suggestions on the types of punishments and sentences he'd think the criminal should deserve. He's caught a lot of bad people in his life, after all.

So as a result of this, his phone's future abilities are told in the form of his victims intentions and suggested killing methods. How dark... yet, clever. He applauds God for his creativity.

His phone pings again, and the statistics for the nearby opponents appear on screen:

***USER 2:***

*STRENGTH: 2/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 2/5*
*TEAMWORK: 3/5*

***USER 3:***

*STRENGTH: 3/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 4/5*
*TEAMWORK: 3/5*

*I outmatch both of them in all statistics. Taking them down should be easy, but I should still keep my guard up.*

Joko stands up and slings his bag over his shoulder. It was about time he'd have to speed up the process of the game. He's got only two months before the game would supposedly 'end', according to God. And he wasn't intending on waiting around until that day came.

Shoving his smartphone into the pockets of his jacket, he runs at full speed towards the direction of the fields — the direction in which he'd finally encounter his first two victims.

Minutes of seemingly endless running flies by; until at last, the view of an open field emerges from the obscuring hill in his path. Scattered daffodils distributed along the plains of the field bloom a little too sprightly given the dark situation Joko's facing against. In the distance, he can see a cluster of mahogany trees.

There, over by the trees, are two male figures running like a pair of fugitives. Joko assumes these guys are the users.

He takes notice that one has blonde hair, glasses, and is wearing a tri coloured jacket (red, dark blue, light blue) with a pizza icon on it.

The other has a more dark shade of brown hair, white button-up with black suspenders. And was that.. A hat that said 'milk' on it..? He can't really tell from this distance.

He watches unfazed, as the two boys race down the fields dirt pathways stretching out for miles along the valley's horizons.

Unhooking the grenade from his pouch, he coils his fingers around the body of it, pressing his finger over the spoon as he readies his grip. He notices the boy in white turning around, making direct eye contact with him. Joko gives him a casual wave.

He yells something at his friend, and the two speed up.

A complacent smile curls slightly along his face as he watches the two run. He'll give them a head start, just to be merciful. But he knows that no matter how much time he'll give them, he'll end up overtaking them in the end.

This can't be any more different than chasing down runaway criminals, after all.

Suddenly, a wildfire of impulse tingles his senses. Adrenaline rushes through his veins as he braces himself to run at the speed of light.

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***DIARY USER 3***

"Fuck, Ted!" his friend yells out, staggering over his feet as he runs. "I told you he was a triple 5 in everything! If your stupid ass just listened to me then we might have gotten away sooner!"

Carson, who's running just a few feet ahead of him, is holding a small handgun in both his hands that the two boys bargained off of a shop a couple of days ago.

"How was I supposed to know you weren't joking that time, Carson?!" he argues back.

Ted's alliance with Carson started off quite shaky, as the two ended up meeting each other by that very same gun store. It had freaked him out when he received his first message on that phone:

*"100M AWAY, PLAYER NUMBER 2 IS LIVE."*

He ended up piecing together that "LIVE" was actually the broadcasting slang for meaning 'nearby'. When he first received such a message, he had no idea what to do. Ted never hurt anybody in his life. He's just a teenage dude who commentates on broadcasted, small local sport games. What the hell could he ever possibly know about fighting?

But to his luck, his opponent was nowhere near keen to be killing, either. That's how the two ended up forming a small truce. Of course, Ted kept his guard up. Even in trucing to an alliance, he could never be sure if Carson would turn his back against him. He barely knew him.

But as the draws drew on, the two had ended up meshing together quite well, almost as if they had somehow known each other. Maybe in an alternate universe, they did.

It's an odd connection, but a connection he's safe to pronounce that has stemmed into a friendship.

"Okay, I will admit I joke a lot," Carson replies, huffing intermittently as he runs, "but what the hell would make you think I'd joke about something like *this?!"*

Ted cranes his neck around, and notices that 13 isn't moving. He's just standing there.

He slows down, as the unlikely assumption of potential passiveness enters his mind. "He's not moving...?"

"Then all the more reason to get the hell out of here faster!" his friend shouts back, speeding up his pace. Ted takes this as a signal to run faster.

But even despite Carson's confidence, Ted can tell underneath that thick skin is a petrified, weak boy fighting for his own life. He can't blame him.

Because he's terrified, too.

He doesn't want to die here. He *can't* die here. God wouldn't let him die here, like this. Wouldn't he?

Ted snatches a quick glance behind him, and to his horror, 13's no longer there anymore. He's broken off into a run, chasing after them. His long legs stretch out, as he leaps effortlessly along down the hills. He'll catch up in no time at all.

"Carson...!" Anxiety tinges his raspy voice. He starts to lose his breath. Running has never been Ted's forté.

His friend turns around, and almost spontaneously, there's a look

of troubled panic flushing his pink face. He whips out his violently shaking handgun, and recklessly pulls the trigger at 13.

He dodges every bullet. That, or Carson's aim was incredibly off.

"You missed," 13 calls out in the background. "But I can pretend you didn't, if that makes you feel better?"

Neither do the boys laugh. Panting, Carson replies, "yeah it would, thanks for the offer bud."

Ted feels his own pacing begin to slow down — *no, not now.* He can't run out of stamina just yet.

As he races down steadily along the pathway, his hearing manages to pick up the vague sound of an object *clinking.*

*What was that?*

He doesn't have time to think before a small object zooms past from the corner of his eye, drawing his attention away from the path ahead of him. He watches mesmerised as the small object fleets through the air, and a few quick seconds pass before the entire right-side of his vision erupts into flames.

*BOOM!*

Intermittent sounds of ringing explode in his right ear drum.

"--Grenades!" he can faintly hear Carson shriek out. ". . . *--the fuck, grenades! G..."*

The rest of Carson's yells are drowned out by the ringing in Ted's head. Where did he even get those from?

Another grenade is soars past, except this time it's thrown a little closer than before. Exploding into packs of gunpowder, smoke and fire, half his peripheral vision is masked. Ted stumbles around, staggering over into another direction as he begins to lose his footing.

*No. No, no, no.*

Everything around him starts to move in slow motion. He looks down, and notices half his shirt is burnt off.

*"TED, LOOK— !"*

His friend's voice sounds like nothing more than a distant echo in an empty cathedral. Just then, Ted's vision shifts entirely once again, as another explosion covers the last of his line of sight. The explosion is a lot more muffled than the previous two, and his ears are ringing a lot more.

Every other sound is blocked out entirely.

*No...*

His jean pocket vibrates.

His muscles start to tense, straining as they fight to keep his body moving. But as the smoke dwells up inside his lungs, he can't help but submit to his gradually shutting-down body.

Using up the last of his strength, he tries to reach for his pocket

and grab his phone, which somehow still survived after all that.

Squinting at the screen, he's only barely able to make out what it says.

His body goes numb.

In big, bold, red letters, it spells out the two dreaded words:

**DEAD END**

"What..?" he tries to speak, but he's not even sure if he really *is*. "No. . . it. . . it can't..."

*I can't die. Not here. Not now. Please, God. . . please, there has to be another way. I can't die yet!*

He looks up and sees another massive explosion, barely in focus. It launches Ted's body into the air, causing him to splutter up clumps of blood as he's thrown into the sky, landing with a heavy THUD! against a tree.

He sees Carson running towards him.

He sees 13 running away, for some reason.

He sees a hand shake his shoulders.

*"I don't want to..."* his voice trails off.

He sees . . . black.

# ➳ CHAPTER 7: allies

**chapter 7 ; allies**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

He's been running for days; through streets, to towns, to houses. And right now, he's finding himself walking through a forest out in the middle of nowhere. Already he's eaten half of the food in his bag, and has downed a minimum of at least 3 water bottles (though, a few being refilled about twice at a public drink fountain).

He knows he has to start cracking down on his food rations sometime soon.

To his relief, he didn't need to fight anybody in those past 5 days ever since the Incident... aside from Sneeg.

Right, five days ago, as soon as the God Encounter was over, Techno was sent back into the real world. He had hoped that the re-encounter with God would've lasted a little longer so he could stall. But to his disappointment, it didn't. When he woke back up, he was in an immense amount of pain, and very quickly the reality of the situation came back to taunt him once again. There Sneeg collapsed on the ground as he regained his consciousness.

Techno used this time to quickly recover and escape. The keys to the motorbike Poke had used were luckily still inserted inside the vehicle's key hold. All he had to do was turn on the engine.

Considering it was his first time ever driving a motorbike, he didn't do too bad. He drove it pretty far away — far enough for Sneeg to never have a chance of catching up to him. That was, until he stuffed it up by crashing it, getting stuck in a giant lake of mud. He was fine, but the bike wasn't — the thing was completely busted after that.

He also discovered a new app God had downloaded on his phone — the statistics. When he opened it up later that day, he came across Sneeg and Poke's' stats:

**Sneeg is:**

Strength: 4.5/5

Intelligence: 3/5

Teamwork: 4/5

**While Poke was:**
Strength: 4/5
Intelligence: 2/5
Teamwork: 3/5

What had confused him the most though, was his *own* stats — according to them, he was ranked a 5 in strength. How the hell would a guy like him, whose never even punched a single punching bag, end up being a *5?*

The vibrations of his phone buzzing knock him out of his train of recollective thoughts. Techno pulls it out, turning on the screen:

*USER 13 HAS GRENADED USER 3.*

*USER 3 HAS REACHED A **DEAD END.***

He swallows as he reads the words on the screen.

"Second kill of the game," he murmurs out loud, letting the reality of it all sink in. Not even an entire week later, somebody else died. Somebody else who had a whole life ahead of them — somebody who went through so much, experienced so much, met so many people and lived an entirely different childhood.

*Somebody who was human.*

It's crazy, really, to think that this is all really *real*. The very concept of killing people to become God. Who's to say that this 'reward' is even legitimate?

Regardless of such, ever since his hand were dirtied by the grime of Poke's blood, he understood.

He understood now that this wasn't just a dream, or any game.

It was a fight of life or death. A fight to **survive**.

He's a murderer, now. That day when he killed Poke — that day that was only a reality five days ago — his life as he knew it changed. As the horrible truth unveiled itself to him, he's come to learn to accept that this new life he's been given is a life he needs to survive in. If he has to fight, then he will. He can't run away, not anymore.

He checks the statistics of User 3, the one who just died. Average.

User 13 ... Wait, what?

*... He's...?*

*He's 5 for everything?!*

He rubs his eyes, taking another glance at the screen. But he's not mistaken — every single one of his statistics are a 5/5. Incredible.

Before he can say or think anything else, he hears his phone buzz again for the 23478324th time.

*YOU ARE APPROACHING PLAYERS NUMBER 11 AND 12.*

*THEY ARE ALLIED.LOCATION: APPROX. 100M AWAY.*

*0% SIGNS OF HOSTILITY. THEY ARE UNAWARE YOU ARE NEARBY.*

"A team? Not trying to kill me for once? That's new." If only he had someone to share his sarcasm with, too. But wait, 0 signs of hostility?

Could this mean he might potentially have a shot at forming some sort of alliance with them? He realises that their stats are now available.

***USER 11:***
*STRENGTH: 4/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 2/5*
*TEAMWORK: 3/5*

***USER 12:***
*STRENGTH: 0/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 4/5*
*TEAMWORK: 5/5*

"A 0/5 in strength?" he reads out, surprised at himself. "That's possible?"

His memory archives dig back to when God first announced the introductions of his opponents.

*' . . . 16 years old, and is a boy scout. Signed up to sell cookies but ended up learning about survival. But for the most part he's pretty useless.'*

*Useless... 0/5...*

Could he be that player? Could he be User 12?

He forgot the majority of their names and numbers, but this certain connection might seem to have a link. If 12 really is that boy scout kid God had mentioned a few days ago, then that would mean he'd be extremely harmless, right? But wait, that makes no sense. Don't scouts learn all about survival? So how is he a 0?

Either way, his 5/5 strength would be enough to take the two of them down. If it really comes down to it, he can just rely on luck to take them head on. . . Not that he would *want* to. He prefers to avoid killing any way possible, unless really necessary. But he doesn't intend on crossing that bridge any time soon.

He checks his phone, for it buzzes once more.

*PLAYERS 11 AND 12 ARE 40M AWAY.*
*THEY KNOW YOU ARE NEAR. KEEP GOING FORWARD.*
*0% INTENTIONS OF HARM.*

He nods solemnly to himself; complying by the diary's orders, he continues to march forward in the depths of the looming forest.

Swatting a tree branch out his path, he calls out, assuming they must be close enough to hear his voice. "Hey, I know you're here. And I know you guys know, too."

He hears a few leaves rustling, but no voice. Techno frowns. "I don't want to hurt you guys."

Another ruffle. He stops walking, perking his head up to listen to any more sounds.

"That's what they all s—" he hears a muffled voice being interjected by the sound of a slap. "Shut up, dude!" follows another voice, which ironically was louder than the first.

Techno turns to where the sounds came from — the voices were a dead giveaway of their location. He creeps forward slowly, swatting the last bush out his way. Behind it, reveals a small, spacious area, free of clustered bushes.

Hiding in the corner of the area beside a tree stump are two boys - one behind it, and the other in a protective stance in front of him. The more timid looking one's coiffure is a shade of dark chocolate brown; his curly strands of hair brushed gently behind his dog-like ears. He's wearing a pink sweater, with a collar shirt tucked underneath. He's sitting with his knees tucked to his chest behind the log, with a fearful look plastered over his face.

The other is standing in front of him, waving some sort of hand-carved wooden dagger in his hand. His dirty blonde hair is covered with a flat cap, and he's wearing an adidas jacket. Techno recognizes him. He's the one who yelled at God at the very start of their first meet-up.

"Stay away from us!" blonde yells, waving hs small dagger at Technoblade. His eyebrows are furrowed, and he glares at him with a spiteful flicker in his eyes. His face remains cold and confident, but it's his trembling arms that give his real nature away.

*They're afraid of me because I must seem powerful to them* .

"Yeah," the darker agrees, biting his nails, "We don't want to fight you, please! Just turn around and pretend you never—"

"No," Techno interrupts, predicting where this will go already. He raises both his hands up, and steps forward. "I told you already, I don't want to kill you."

Blonde hisses at him, unconvinced. "What are you talking about? You killed the first guy in the game. And you're the strongest player, too."

"I didn't mean to kill him!" he shoots back in defense, "I didn't mean for any of this to happen! He was trying to hunt me down and kill me first, so I ran as fast as I could. I know it sounds stupid, but I somehow pinned him down and accidentally stabbed him. Okay, that sounds really stupid. You probably don't believe me, but I swear on my life I didn't know what was going on!"

As if the timid boy suddenly has a change in heart, he stands up, tugging at Blonde's pants. "Wait, Coop. . ." he starts, "I think he's

telling the truth. Maybe we..."

*Oh yeah, he's Cooper. The skateboarder dude.*

"No, Travis!" Archie argues. "How can we trust him? How do we know we're not gonna end up like 6?!"

The darker haired — who he called Travis — turns around and looks at Techno. An optimistic glimmer of hope glistens in his rich pupils underneath the dim light of the condensed forest.

Silence paints the atmosphere as Techno stares back into his eyes, trying desperately to signal his loyalty to his word. He truly does not want to fight.

"Because I have faith in what he says," Travis finally says. Cooper's jaw drops in disbelief, and he throws his hands up in annoyance.

*Faith in him? A man he just met already trusts him?*

Either this Travis guy has a talent for reading minds, or he's a complete fool.

"I want to be your ally," Techno responds submissively, insisting on his passiveness. To further try gain their trust, he throws his backpack onto the ground.

Cooper glares at him skeptically, before quickly scurrying hastily towards the bag. Grabbing it with caution, he tips it over, emptying its supplements.

Travis inclines over close behind, curious to see what was in the bag. Out falls his clothes, canned foods, water bottles, and—

"Weapons?" Cooper raises an eyebrow, as he picks up the small pistol he packed inside. "Where did you get this gun from?"

"My house?" Techno shrugs.

Travis digs through the supplies, and suddenly lets out a squeal. His eyes dart over to him, and find that he's accidentally pricked his finger with the blade of one of the kitchen knives he packed.

"Oh, be careful with that," he quickly says, but realises it was probably a bit too late of a warning. Cooper glances over at Travis, and sees a large knife laying beside him. He picks it up.

"You have a pistol *and* a butcher knife*?"* he gapes. He's not really sure why though, kitchen knives are pretty common. "Jesus Christ. How many weapons does one guy need?"

"Uh, well actually," Techno adds, suddenly remembering the small dagger he had been keeping sheathed in his pocket the entire time. "I have three."

He throws the pocket knife onto the ground beside Cooper. His eyes grow wide like a curious puppy.

"Maybe he's serious when he says he wants to ally." he mutters to Travis, not taking his eyes off the knife.

"Don't tell me you guys didn't bring any weapons with you?"

Techno smirks light-heartedly, half-joking. But at the same time, a fraction of him prays that these people aren't *that* stupid.

"Of course we did," Cooper frowns, seemingly disappointed he'd even assume such a thing. "A gun each, actually. Until this idiot here dropped them in a lake."

He glares at Travis, who looks away, flustered. Techno raises an eyebrow. A lake? Couldn't they just. . . ?

"You could... swim?"

The two fall silent. It takes Techno a few seconds to realise.

"Wait, you guys can't *swim?"*

"Hey, it's not like God made us do some fuckin' freestyle competition to the death," Cooper shoots back a little too aggressively, shoving his hands in his pockets. "So I don't see why that really matters here."

He finds himself chuckling for the first time in weeks. "You got me there, I guess."

"Um... T.. Techno..Blade? Technoblade?" Travis says, pointing at the boy. "That's your name, right?"

It surprises him how he actually remembers. He doesn't remember anyone's name from the introductions, other than Sneeg and Poke's.

"Yeah," Techno nods, "but you can call me Techno."

Travis smiles warmly, lifting up the atmosphere of the entire forest. He leans into Techno, and it takes him a minute to process that he actually pulled him into a hug.

"Welcome to the team then, Techno!" he grins in alacrity.

His body is rigid at first as he's in his arms — he hasn't hugged anyone in a while. But to his surprise, the tight embrace spreads a safe feeling of warmth throughout his body. He hugs back.

He finally pulls away from the embrace, leaning over as he watches Cooper inspect the pistol. He doesn't look very amused.

"Is your friend cool with me joining you guys?" Techno turns to Travis for reassurance. Cooper speaks up instead.

"Well I guess next time Travis drops our guns in the water, we could actually get them back again. So... whatever, you're part of the team. If you don't mind getting soaking wet."

"Woohoo!" Travis cheers, his beam growing wider on his face as he punches a fist in the air, like celebrating some sort of epic victory reunion. Even Techno manages to grin a little.

The thought of finally no longer having to spend the rest of this game alone eases a lot of his stress. He made his first allies in the game.

*Cooper, and Travis.*

They might not be the strongest or most advantageous — but

they trusted him. At least, Travis does.

And having faith in somebody is the most important quality of a teammate.

He doesn't know much about allies, but he has a feeling that these people will become more than just teammates. They may even be his friends.

*We'll make a good team,* he thinks to himself, and for once he doesn't feel so alone anymore. Like there's actually hope in this sick game.

Alec hears his phone buzz. He pulls it out.

***USERS 11 AND 12** WILL BECOME YOUR ALLIES.*

*THEY WILL TRUST YOU.*

He can't help but smile warmly to himself.

# ➳ CHAPTER 8: friends

**chapter 8 ; friends**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

It's been 2 days since Techno formed his new alliance of three — with himself, Cooper, and Travis. They settled on an agreement that for the next few days, they'd be hiding out in the forest. It's not only safer since they're surrounded by different exits and escape routes, but also because it would be more difficult for players to navigate them. They also each assigned each other shifts and errands they had to run for the day, just to keep them occupied on their feet.

During this time, Techno had also figured out that they were able to add eachother's contacts to their phones, so if anything happened they could call each other for help.

Now, it's currently 5:00 PM. Cooper was assigned the supply errand for tonight, so he's gone to find supplies and explore the area for more escape routes.

In the meantime, Techno has found himself sitting by a hand-crafted campfire he made, beside Travis, who's busy fidgeting with his sleeves. He decides to finally have a conversation with him, since he hasn't really gotten to know the kid.

"So what did you do as a boy scout?" he asks, trying to find a good conversation starter. He recalls Travis mentioning it the first time they met, but he never really elaborated. Thinking about it now, it makes him curious — don't boy scouts learn how to survive in the wild?

As he mulls over the thought, he extends his hands out to the fire to warm himself up. Travis does the sam.

"Well..." he responds, giving the question a good think. "The basic stuff, really. Like learning camping skills, how to survive in the wilderness. How to set up a fire..."

He pauses for a moment, allowing a few beats of nervous silence to drag on in the atmosphere. Then, he looks down, mumbling in a quieter tone. "But ... I never would have thought that I'd have to use those skills for a situation like *this*.."

"Yeah, me neither." His gaze trails over to Travis, whose gazing absentmindedly into the blazing fire. "If I knew, I would have at

least tried a little harder to become an actual hitman."

A dejected sigh slips from his mouth, as he slumps in his seat. A sense of hopelessness washes over his eyes, tainting his words with anguish. "At least you actually have a shot at winning."

The words send him into a freeze — at least he actually has a *shot* at *winning?* What does he mean by that? He knows *nothing* about survival, not in the slightest.

"In scouts," Travis goes on, "I was the weakest member out of all the boys there. I wasn't strong enough to set up the tents, and I was too scared to step into the bushes at night. I couldn't even bring myself to kill a mouse. The thought of me holding a weapon in my hand during scouts made me sick to my stomach. How could I ever be able to survive and make it through this game, killing *people,* when I can't even bare to kill a *fly?* I'm weak and pathetic, that's what I am."

By the last sentence, he's already breaking down into soft cries. He buries his head in his hands, in an attempt to muffle his sobs. It breaks him inside, seeing Travis act so vulnerable like this. He's the sweetest, most genuine guy on the outside — but he should have known, that on the inside he's as fragile as glass.

"Travis..." he mumbles, feeling his own heart tear at the sight of seeing his friend so hopeless and lost. He shuffles over closer to him, hesitating a little before putting a hand over his shoulder. He's never done that, before. Comforting someone.

"You're not pathetic," he tells him. "Being afraid of killing people and surviving this game isn't pathetic, it's *humane.* Anyone who thinks otherwise are the people who are really pathetic. Meeting you Travis, it feels as if I've finally met someone like . . . *me."*

He pauses for a moment before speaking again; a small smile curls along his lips.

"You know, Travis. I take it back. If not wanting to murder a living human being is considered pathetic, then consider both me and you the most pathetic beings alive."

Travis laughs a little at that, and the two smile.

"Thanks, Techno. Really." There's an innocence interweaved in his voice; so naive, as if he's a wise old man talking to a young child. It only makes him want to protect him more — like his entire world will crumble if he sees Travis get hurt. How is it, that somebody so delicate can make him feel emotions so strong?

Travis glances up at him, the innocent beam along his face growing wider. "I know we only met a few days ago, but for some reason it feels like I've known you my whole life. Besides, with you in our team. . . maybe we might have a chance at. . . well, surviving. For a little while longer than we thought."

He struggles to admit it, but Techno can see the flicker of doubt in his hazel eyes. Yes, of course. Travis may be naive, but he isn't stupid, either. He knows his chances of surviving are little to none. Whether or not he's come to terms with accepting the fate of death, Techno doesn't know.

Silence taints the atmosphere, dragging on the tension between the two until Travis finally decides to change the subject.

"I don't really know much about you, what did you do as a hitman's assistant?"

It's a question he didn't see coming, that's for sure. He's never had anyone ask him about how *his* life was like. Come to think of it, the memories of his life before the game are quite hasy in his mind.

He turns back to the crackling fire before him, closing his eyes as he tries to let the recollection of memories come back to him.

"Nothing that interesting, I don't think," he recollects. "I just sat behind a desk all day, doing paperwork and collecting information about our targets. So believe me when I say this, I know *nothing* about killing."

Travis, leaning in with keen eyes and ears, nods along. He seems way too interested in the discussion than he should be, really. "So, did you enjoy your job?"

"Ah... did I enjoy it?" Well, the answer was a no-brainer. "It's better than working in McDonalds. At least I don't have to spend most my life smelling regurgitated meat and lettuce made of sandpaper."

Travis chuckles, and Techno is reminded of how great it feels to finally talk to someone.

"How was your life like before you became a hitmans assistant?" The curiosity in his eyes twinkle more. It almost surprises him, really. How anyone can be that interested about his life.

"Well, my life before I was hitmans assistant..." he trails off, finding himself spacing out as his eyes hover in a vacant distance. *His life before he was a hitmans assistant. . .*

When he thinks about it, he can't help but picture nothing but an empty mind. He tries to dig into his consciousness, to find something - *anything* - that will answer Travis' question. But for some reason, his mind is completely blank.

It's as if he has *no memory* of his past.

"I... I'm sorry." He mutters, his face flushing warm with embarrassment. "I can't remember."

He feels stupid for not remembering - what kind of person forgets a good ten years of their life?! Travis must think he's hiding something from him, now. That, or his dementia is arriving early.

"No, no! That's fine." Travis waves his hands out, smiling in

reassurance. "I get it. Everything is super overwhelming right now, so I get that you can't remember. It's okay."

He feels himself relax so calmly by his words. It makes him all the more grateful he's met someone like Travis in his life. He smiles a little, looking back to him.

"Hey, Travis," Techno starts, "If we ever get out of here alive, somehow. . . do you want to. . . I don't know. Be friends?"

Travis raises an eyebrow; "I thought we were already friends." He looks at him as he speaks, his eyes glimmering once more.

He holds out his hand. "But just to make things official... Friends?"

Techno smiles. He shakes his hand.

"*Friends*."

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Their conversation is interrupted by the ringing of Travis' phone. He shoots up from his seat on the log, quickly picking it up and putting it on speakerphone.

"Trav!! Techno!! Guys, you wouldn't believe what I just found!"

It's Cooper, and he seems entirely out of breath, yet at the same time he sounds enthralled.

"What is it?!" Techno exclaims back into the phone.

The phone crackles a little, becoming slightly static-y due to lack of reception out in the forest. Despite the cackling *hissss* that breaks through the speaker every couple of lines, he's able to make out the jist of what Cooper's saying.

"It's some sort of giant building with an underground parking lot ...*[STATIC]*.... —and I think this place is our best shot at stocking up on supplies! .... *[MORE STATIC]*..... —so just meet me here, hurry! And bring your backpacks!"

The phone hangs up. Then suddenly, it hits Techno — meet up with him *where?* He hadn't given his location at all. How the hell are they meant to find him? Though, it seems like Travis must be some sort of psychic, because he's able to figure out what he's thinking and answers his question with ease.

"My diary tells me the exact location of places I'm told to go to," he says, getting up and heaving his backpack over his shoulder. "In scouts, our the Captian would always assign me errands to run and places to go. I guess it's kinda cool how my diary does that too."

Techno follows his lead, also slinging his bag over his back. "That is sorta cool. So your diary just immediately guides you to where Cooper is?"

"Mhm!"

Travis looks at his phone for a minute and then points left. "This way!"

Techno nods and follows his lead, and the two boys run through the bushes.

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They were quiet the whole time, mainly because they were focusing on not getting scratched in the face by a tree branch. The only noises to be heard was the sounds of ruffling nature and shoes hitting the muddy dirt ground.

After jumping over bushes, ducking under tree branches, and turning corners, they eventually reach the end of the forest. Past the last tree was in fact a large area covered with paving, and a giant facility-like building. Like what Cooper had promised, there was a massive underground car park in front of them.

The place see Cooper is sitting on a rock a few feet away. Travis slows down and yells.

"Hi Coo—!"

Techno bumps into him and they both fall out from the forest, and hit the concrete floor.

Cooper is sitting on a rock a few feet away, and he rolls his eyes.

"Nice one, dumbass" He rolls his eyes at Technoblade.

Techno groans as he gets up. Travis seems to have recovered just fine from the fall, and he's already running to Cooper, saluting.

"Where to, Captain?"

"Okay, you see those outside stairs? The ones you use for fire emergencies? We're gonna go up that and raid the floors one by one, and then we're gonna head down to the underground parking lot to see if there's anything there"

"Sounds good" Techno nods. Cooper gets up and the three boys begin to make their way towards the building.

Techno's phone buzzes from his pocket, and he receives a strange message he has never had before.

Unlike his usual messages, this one is not told in the regular format. All it says is:

*BE CAREFUL, TECHNO.*

# ➳ CHAPTER 9: stick

**chapter 9 ; stick**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Ho-ly shit"

Cooper opens the back door to the stairs.

The outdoor stairs to the building were about 30 meters high from the ground below. Cooper is at the front of the pack, and he is the first to walk inside.

"What is it? What do you see?" Travis asks, trying to see from behind.

"It looks like a hospital or something" Cooper responds. Travis walks inside, followed by Techno.

Techno unknowingly breathes in the foul air, and he splutters a cough.

"It reeks of dead bodies in here" He gags.

Chills were sent up his spine, and he felt himself twitch a little. The place was eerily dark, and not to mention cold.

In front of the boys was a wide hallway with lots of metal doors, stretching out into the rest of the darkness ahead of them. The dim moonlight from outside shone through the open door, which allowed at least some light to illuminate the area— even if it was only a little.

Though, not much of the was able to be seen. Aside from the thin outlines of walls and doors, Techno couldn't see anything.

He walks forward, and he finds himself the one in front of the others. Cooper seems to be hesitating to go any further.

"This doesn't seem like a safe place..." Travis' voice is shaky, "G-Guys.. I think we should go.."

"No, this could our chance to find something useful" Cooper says firmly, trying to stay assertive. He walks forward slowly, but even Techno could feel his subtle fear.

There was something off about this place.

One by one, they steadily walk through the hall.

For some strange reason, his heartbeat remained casual.

Techno hears something squelch from under his shoe. Something.. Sticky.

"Heh?"

Cooper pulls out his phone and turns on the flashlight, which was something he really should have done earlier.

Techno feels himself choke on his own saliva.

*Blood.*

*It was blood.*

"What the fuck!?" Cooper exclaims, almost dropping the phone.

He shines the light in a different direction, lighting up most of the hall. He finds that there was blood not only all over the floors, but the walls too.

Travis lets out a sickening scream before throwing up beside him.

But Techno's eyes are locked onto the ground below him.

His shoes are smeared with dark, old and adhesive blood. The stench of metal and vomit fills his nostrils, and he begins to gag again.

"There's fucking blood everywhere!!" Cooper screams, and without thinking he bolts down the hallway, "Fucking blood!! What the fuck?!"

He snaps out of it and quickly looks up, watching as Cooper is sprinting away.

"Wait!! Cooper!!" Techno yells, chasing after him.

Cooper's loud yelling echoes along the walls, drowning out the sounds of the blood splattering against their shoes.

He turns a corner— and then another— and at this point, he has no idea where he's running to.

"Cooper! Stop!!" Techno calls out again, heart rate increasing as his sneakers pounded heavily against the floor. His breathing is ragged, and everything around him is a blur.

Cooper suddenly slips, and his body crashes onto the thick, slimy floor. He lets out another repulsive shriek as he throws himself against a wall like a little kid.

Tears stream down his face, and he sobs in his arms.

Techno slows down and catches up. "Cooper?"

"I'm such a fucking pussy," He cries between sobs. Even though it was dark, Techno can see blood spread out all over his arms.

"I'm supposed to be the brave one. I'm supposed to be the one who knows what they're doing. I'm not supposed to be such a wimp. *I'm so pathetic.*"

His voice breaks, and Techno kneels down in front of him. He gets hit with a sense of deja-vu, and is reminded of what Travis had said earlier.

He puts a hand on his arm and looks him in the eyes. He lowers his voice.

"You aren't pathetic, man. I mean, come on, look at us. We're sitting in a place smeared with blood and potentially dead bodies. Who wouldn't be afraid? If anything, you're the complete opposite of a wimp"

He looks up at him with big eyes.

"Sometimes, being brave isn't about not being afraid. Sometimes, it's about having the guts to do something you're afraid of."

Cooper looks down at his hands. "Then why don't you look scared?"

Techno pauses. Why *wasn't* he scared?

"... I don't know"

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Their silence doesn't last long before Cooper suddenly notices something.

"Wait, where's Travi—"

Sirens begin to blast from within the building, and the whole place flashes red. Cooper covers his ears with his hands, startled by the sudden booming noise.

"What's happening?!" He yells over the top of the sounds.

Techno frantically searches for his phone and tries to see if there are any new messages.

There is.

*USERS 7 AND 8 HAVE INFILTRATED THE BUILDING.*
*LOCATION: 4 FLOORS ABOVE YOU. THEY ARE AWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE.*
*50% HOSTILITY. THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY INTENTIONS OF FIGHTING.*
*THEY ARE SETTING UP TRAPS.*

"*Shit* " Techno cusses under his breath, "There are two people here!"

Travis suddenly screams from the other end of the place.

Without hesitation, Cooper gets up and darts towards the direction of his friends voice.

Techno grips his phone tightly in his hand and runs after Cooper. He prays to himself that Travis is safe.

"Travis! Are you okay?!" Cooper yells, searching for his friend. To their relief, Travis appears from the other end of the hall.

"C-Cooper! Techno!" He pants, "T-The.. *thed-doorislockedohmygod*!!"

"What?" Techno replies, "Travis, slow down!"

Travis takes a few deep breaths before repeating himself. "The door is locked! It just closed randomly! And I can't open it!! *We're trapped!* "

At this point, Travis is practically screaming over the top of the sirens.

"No, we're not!" Cooper yells, "There has to be some other way to get out of here! C'mon!"

Cooper grabs and pulls Travis by the wrist as he sprints down the hall. Techno doesn't hesitate to follow his lead.

There was no time now to check his phone, or their stats. Their best option was to hide and discuss what their next motive will be.

Techno tries to think, despite of the chaos going on.

Users 7 and 8 were 4 floors above them. As specified by the diary, they do not seem to be wanting to target them. Either they waste their time running, or they hide and wait for them to leave.

He hears his phone buzz in his pocket, but he doesn't have time to check. The sirens are still blaring and echoing throughout the halls. At least the alarms provided a bit of light.

They run to a section of the hallway with lots of doors. But none of them had an EXIT sign.

It was another dead end.

Cooper growls in frustration. "Where's the motherfucking exit he—?!"

Before Cooper can finish his sentence, Technoblade grabs his arm and pulls him into a room. Turns out, one of the doors was left open.

Cooper yelps as he and Techno fall inside of a small room covered with tiles and red-stained white walls. Travis quickly follows them in, shutting the door behind them.

The room is as dark as the hallway. It seems to have blocked out most of the noises.

There is a sink and two beds covered by a set of curtains. Like a typical hospital room.

The three boys sit in front of the door.

"Stop. Panicking" Techno grabs both of Cooper's shoulders, "There are two people 4 floors above us, and they're not hunters. We still have time to escape. We just have to calm down and think of our next move."

"Our next move is to fucking escape from this place, that's what!" Cooper yells, swatting away Techno's hands.

"We'll escape once we have a plan!" Techno shoots back defensively.

"If we stay here long enough, we won't even be *alive* to think of a plan!"

"If you keep this up they're—"

"Guys!!" Travis yells, breaking up the argument between the two, "Stop!! Just stop!! Please! If we keep fighting we're going to get

nowhere!"

Techno's voice trails off, and he stops. Travis was right. Arguing will waste time. And right now, time was valuable.

Before Cooper or Techno can say anything, all their phones suddenly buzz at the same time.

Techno turns on his phone:

*STICK*

"Stick?" He reads aloud.

"Mine says 'always' " Cooper says, reading the single text on his phone, "This doesn't make any sense"

Travis gasps. "Oh!!"

"What?"

He snatches the two phones from their hands and places them down in a single file on the floor. Travis puts Techno's phone in the middle, Cooper's on the left, and his own on the right.

The message instantly clicked.

*ALWAYS STICK TOGETHER.*

# ➳ CHAPTER 10: I found you

**chapter 10 ; I found you**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Always stick together!" Travis reads aloud. He tries to smile at the two, but neither of them return the glance. Mainly because Technoblade was too busy reading through the previous few messages on his phone— the ones that buzzed while he was running.

*USERS 7 AND 8 ARE MAKING THEIR WAY DOWNSTAIRS. THEY HAVE PLANTED SEVERAL TRAPS IN FLOORS 2 AND ABOVE, AND THEY ARE PLANNING ON PLACING MORE IN THE CAR PARK.*
*BOTH USERS OWN A SEMI AUTOMATIC HAND GUN THEY HAD BOUGHT RECENTLY FROM A GUN SHOP.*
*THEY DO NOT KNOW YOUR EXACT LOCATION ; NOT PLANNING TO ATTACK UNLESS YOU ATTACK FIRST.*
*LOCATION: 20M AWAY ON FLOOR ABOVE*
*THEY ARE PREPARED FOR A FIGHT.*

***STATS AVAILABLE.***

The stats are available. He does not hesitate to tap on them:

***USER 7:***
*STRENGTH: 3.5/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 4.5/5*
*TEAMWORK: 5/5*

***USER 8:***
*STRENGTH: 5/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 3/5*
*TEAMWORK: 2/5*

"I just saw their stats," Techno says, looking up from his phone to his two friends, "They're strong. Luckily, they aren't onto us."

"Do you know where they are now?" Travis asks.

"They're planting traps on the floor above us. We shouldn't fight them, they're both equipped with semi-automatic guns"

Cooper picks up his phone off ground and quickly reads through his messages.

"Who are they?" He finally queries.

It strikes Technoblade as odd how his diary doesn't seem to tell him the enemies, but nonetheless he answers with a straight face.
"User 7 and 8. I can't remember their names."

"7 and 8..." Cooper thinks aloud. He scratches his chin. "Wait, aren't they the CD and car guys? Taylor and Jordan?"

Yeah, that's right. It's all coming back to memory now; Taylor, or 'AntVenom', was the guy who worked at the CD store. And Jordan, or also known as 'CaptainSparklez', was the guy who fixes cars. He never imagined those two would team.

Travis on the other hand, seems more interested in something else.
"Your diary is really specific," He observes, pointing at Techno, "How is your future told?"

"Oh, yeah."

He forgot he hasn't told them yet. "Mine tells the victims every move, and sometimes I get information of their motives too."

Both of the boys jaws drop. But what for? Surely his diary wasn't *that* good.

"Dude.. That's *OP!!"*
Cooper's eyes are wide open, "Mine just tells me things that are gonna happen to me. I know, lame"

"So it tells you your future?"

"Pretty much. I used to take notes on skateboarding tricks and what would happen to me if I mess up and stuff, so that may be why."

*That's actually really helpful.*

He snaps out of it and comes back to reality. He doesn't have time to ponder about his friend's diary— they could get killed at any minute now. They had to get out of here.

Techno hurriedly gets up and scans around the room a bit to find any useful weapons. Beside the sink is a surgical knife.

"We have to get out of here" He runs to the sink and picks up the weapon. He throws it on the floor, as well as his backpack. With careful hands, he opens up his bag and pulls out his gun.

Cooper scurries toward him, with Travis following behind.

"Travis, have this," He hands him the gun. Travis seems to be the most vulnerable out of the three, so he decides to give him the less-gruesome weapon. He hands Cooper the surgical knife.

"Are we killing them?!" Travis exclaims, horrified. Cooper's hand flies to Travis' mouth to stop him from screaming.

"They're for defense" Techno hisses. Silence fills the air.

Technoblade turns around to the window behind them, and he only just realises that it's dark outside.

The room is dimly illuminated by the moonlight shining through the window. In a weird way, it felt kind of reassuring.
For some reason, he feels a chill run up his spine. It must have been a hours by now.

Cooper takes his hand off from Travis' mouth, and he slowly takes a few steps forward. His footsteps are swift against the tiles, and he seems focused on a particular section of the wall.

Technoblade watches him silently, waiting to see what he was doing.

"Coopie?" Travis whispers shakily.

Cooper's hands come in contact with the wall, and he starts to dig his fingers into it.
The walls crack as dust falls, before revealing a large door that was covered by a thin layer of wallpaper. The two boys gasp, and even Cooper seems to be surprised.

"I didn't think that would work.." Cooper mumbles.

"How did you do that?" Technoblade runs over beside him.

"My diary said I'll find a hidden door in here," Cooper says, "And the walls seemed a bit off"

On the door was a metal sign written in bold letters:
**EXIT TO PARKING LOT**
**E X I T T O P A R K I N G L O T**

Cooper turns the handle, and sure enough the door is unlocked. Behind the door reveals a staircase leading down to what he could only assume was the underground car park. He turns to Travis and Technoblade, who were now standing behind him.

"Let's go down," He nods at them, "We can easily escape them and avoid fighting. Then we can head back to our base in the forest"

Techno's phone buzzes.

*USER 7 AND 8 HAVE REACHED THE UNDERGROUND PARKING LOT.*

Cooper takes Travis by the hand and is about to make his way down, when Technoblade yells.

"Wait!"

His mind trails back to the message he recieved earlier; the one about setting traps. If 7 and 8 are already down there, then they may be in even more danger than they already are.

"My diary just said they're are down there! We can't go that way!" He averts his gaze to the window.
"We should jump out the window inste—"

"Are you fucking crazy, pig boy?" Cooper yells at him, "We'd break our legs if we jumped out! This is the only way, we just have to run as fast as we can"

"But we'll..."

*We'll die if we go there.*

His voice trails off as he sees Cooper and Travis rush down the stairs before he can continue.

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***DIARY USER 7***

"Have they moved floors yet?" Sparklez asks.

"No, they're still there" He responds back. His shoes and legs are covered in blood from running past those rooms with dead bodies. While the sight of seeing dead people had shocked him, he had grown quickly used to it.

The doors to the elevator open, and the boys don't hesitate to run out. He's holding a large, plastic jerrycan; and Sparklez is carrying a backpack filled with electrical supplies.

As they run through a line of parked cars, he pours a trail of gasoline. The cars are heavily rusted and look to have been left there for years.

Sparklez is running in front of him, holding a bag of wires in his left hand.

"That means we still have time 'til we set it up," He grins mischievously, tightening his grip on the can.

"One of them is 5 in strength," Sparklez says solemnly, "We have to make sure they don't fight us or we're dead for sure"

"Yeah, let's hope this works" He replies. Sparklez stops and bends down at the corner where the next file of cars follow. He takes out some wires and links them to the back engine.

"Hey Ant, do the thing with the rope again"

"Got ya"

Ant pulls out the rope from Sparklez bag, and he throws it up to the pipes and railings along the underground parking lot's ceiling. The rope goes over and back down to him. He pulls on both ends of the rope and ties it into a firm knot.

Sparklez finishes wiring the car's system, and he connects what appears to be a chip of some sort to the tires. He checks his phone—his eyes flicker in disbelief, before growing wide.

"They just came down!" Sparklez exclaims, "Hurry, hurry, let's go up!"

Ant frantically picks up his jerrycan and shoves it in his backpack, and he pulls onto the rope while Sparklez gets up onto the car. Sparklez makes a jump to the rope and he climbs up to the ceiling pipes.

**( for those who don't have a good imagination, something like this:)**

Once he gets up, he tightens the rope so Ant can climb up, too.

He makes it to the top, and the two boys untie the rope and pull it back up to hide the evidence.

While Sparklez is busy tying and packing the rope away, Ant decides to crawl along the ceiling pipes. Now that they have high ground, it will be easier to spot the users.

Something moves in the corner of his eye. He stops and slyly turns his head, squinting.

In the distance, he sees a door open, and three boys walk out.

"I found you," He whispers.

# ➳ CHAPTER 11: don't open the door

**chapter 11 ; don't open the door**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

The exit door to the parking lot swings open, revealing a large underground space packed with cars that look to have been there since the 80s.

Cooper runs out and stops just outside the door, with Travis and Techno right behind.

"Like what I said on our way down," Cooper hisses to them, "Don't. Waste. A *second.* We're gonna get the hell out of here as fast as we fucking can, and we're going back into the forest. And we **aren't** going to die."

He shoots Travis a worried but stern glare, before making a run for it. Techno feels his stomach drop as he feels a wave of uneasiness — like as if he was being watched from afar. But he shakes it off, and follows Cooper's lead.

Cooper is running surprisingly fast for somebody who had just had a panic attack 10 minutes ago from darting around a bloodied hospital for an hour. Travis on the other hand is a bit slower. Huffing and panting wildly, his face is already hot from running.

Techno's running pace is steady as he runs through the line of parked cars.

*Don't think about anything. Just run. Just run. Just keep ru..*

A foul smell fills his nostrils, causing him to stop running. What is this stench? It smells like..

*Gasoline?!*

His gaze averts to the concrete below him— where the smell was coming from— and he gets down onto his knees. He brushes his hand over the rough, stony floor, and notices a bit of liquid run through his fingers.

"Oh crap," He mutters hoarsely, "This can't be good."

His phone buzzes.

*PLAYER NUMBER 7: TAYLOR HARRIS, AKA "HANKVENOM"*
*BORN ON MARCH 28TH, MAINE, U.S*
*30M AWAY ONTOP OF THE CEILING PIPES. HE'S WATCHING YOU CLOSELY.*

*TAYLOR HAS HELPED NUMBER 8 SET A FIRETRAP THROUGHOUT THE PARKING LOT.*
*DO NOT LET COOPER OPEN THE DOOR.*
***THE DOOR WILL TRIGGER THE TRAP.***

Almost as if the message had somehow instantaneously stimulated his nerves, he feels his senses heighten as his heartbeat quickens. He doesn't hesitate to stagger up, and his eyes dart back and forth as he realises that he lost Cooper and Travis.
Now he's aware of two things:

1. He is being watched
2. He needs to find Cooper

"COOPER!" He shrieks, voice cracking from whispering for so long. He suddenly remembers the message they received: *'ALWAYS STICK TOGETHER'.*
He breaks off into a rapid sprint, feet darting over the pavement as he races past the rows of cars. Breath ragged, he shouts out again: "WHERE ARE YOU?!"

Number 7, or 'Taylor', as the diary said — is probably enjoying every single second of this. He grits his teeth in frustration.

*That damned nerd.*

With his other hand, he pulls out his pocketknife and clutches it tightly.

"TECHNO!" yells a petite voice in the distance. Travis!

"*TRAVIS!"*
He turns a corner and navigates toward the direction of Travis' voice.

He manages to spot Travis at the far end on the other side, beside a group of broken cars. Travis' eyes light up and he runs to Techno.

"Techno!! Where were you?!" His voice is quivering with terror, but before Techno can say anything he exclaims again, "T-The place is filled with g—!!"

"I know, where's Cooper?!"

Cooper emerges from behind one of the cars holding a handful of pretty new-looking wires.

"Calm down, I'm here," He calls out, waving the wires in his hand which were supposedly from the car, "And where were you!?"

But Techno swiftly raises his hand, signalling for Cooper to shush. Eery silence fills the atmosphere; he can sense somebody nearby. Techno readjusts his grip on his knife. He perks his head up, and catches something in the corner of his eye.

"Taylor," He whispers to nobody in particular, "I know you're here."

He twists his body and throws the knife at full force. The knife

zooms as fast as lightning through the air, only just missing what appears to be a leg, and instead the knife hits the ceiling pipe. Turns out, that leg belongs to Number 7—Taylor.

Taylor jumps, relieved that the knife had only just missed his leg. But the surprise attack also catches him off guard, and he loses his balance, falling off the pipes.

Travis' mouth is wide open, and he's staring at Techno in disbelief.

"RUN!" Techno yells, and he gestures the two boys to follow him. As they sprint down the aisle of cars, Number 8 suddenly jumps out into view, blocking their path.

He's wearing a dirty red flannel with a white T-Shirt, and black leather pants. His eyes are covered by the red sunglasses he's wearing.

"Oh no you don't, Technoblade," 8 hisses.

8's glare is snarky, and it doesn't take him long before he whips out his gun, aiming it at the three boys.

"Or should I say, the Blood God?"

Techno blinks. *The what?*

"Blood God?"

"What? You don't even know your own nickname?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about"

Cooper and Travis both have blank stares, too.

8 scoffs. "Dude, you got the first kill of the game. You mean to tell me that your diary isn't calling you that?"

Techno's phone buzzes, and he sneaks a quick glance at it.

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*Seriously God?*

Jordan's phone buzzes too and he quickly checks it, though his grip on his gun does not relax.

"He's coming soon," He mutters to himself before sliding his phone back into his pocket. He's holding his gun with both hands at this point.

"Nobody move. I won't hesitate to shoot you!"

Suddenly, a small buggy flies in out of nowhere and skids to a halt beside Jordan. Out hops Taylor, whose standing on top of the vehicle.

"Look at who we have here," Taylor smirks, and his gaze locks with Techno's. For a split second, Techno can see a small gleam of fear in his eyes. Taylor frowns at him.

"How did you know my name?"

"I know more than just your name,"

Techno's eyes are sharp and cold; he was secretly hoping that his intimidation would scare them off.

"I also know you were born in Maine. Your birthday is on the 26th of March, too. Happy birthday 3-month-late birthday, HankVenom"

"How the *fuck!?"*

Taylor takes an aggressive step forward, before 8 holds out his arm and stops him.

"Sparklez, the hell are you doing?! Shoot him! Just kill him for God's s—"

Suddenly, there's a loud BANG! Somebody shot. For a minute, Techno thought that Jordan had shot him, but he doesn't feel any blood on himself.

That's when he realises that Taylor's shoulder is bleeding, and the boy lets out a hearty yell.

"You motherfucker!"

Travis' hands are shaking, and Techno notices that Travis is holding the pistol he gave him.

The supposedly called 'Sparklez' keeps his word, and he immediately pulls the trigger on his gun. The bullet hits Travis in the leg, sending an ear-piercing shriek escape from his throat.

Sparklez hops into the car and jams his foot on the pedestal. The motors roar as the vehicle lets out a bunch of gas.

"Go go go!" Taylor yells.

Techno's eyes grow wide as he sees his friend collapse.

"Travis!!" he exclaims, and he feels a sense of rage overtake him. Fury burning in his chest, he yells as he chases the vehicle.

His hands grasp around the metal, and he heaves himself up on the buggy just before it takes off.

8 is driving the vehicle, and his expression immediately changes to panicked as he sees Techno in his rearview mirror.

"Ant! He's on us!!"

Taylor stands up from his seat as Techno pulls himself over onto the car.

"You aren't getting away with this!" Techno shrieks, clawing his fingers around Taylor's arms. His shoulder is burning from the gunshot, but nonetheless, Taylor fights back.

Using as much force as he can, Techno pushes down Taylor, falling on top of him and onto the backseat of the buggy.

"Get off me!!" Taylor squirms from underneath. His arms flail in Techno's grasp, but he doesn't loosen his grip.

The vehicle swerves and they are almost out of the parking lot.

"You're gonna pay for what you did to him!!"

Techno throws a fist in Taylor's face, making him splutter a clump of blood.

"You're fucking crazy dude! It's just a shot in the leg—"

"You covered the whole place with *gasoline*," He growls, digging

his nails into Taylor's wrists, "You're going to make the whole place *fucking* explode!"

He's about to throw another punch when he feels a metal barrel click against the back of his head.

"Shut up," Sparklez says. He has one hand on the wheel, while the other is on his gun. "It's too late. Your friend Cooper, or whatever his name is, is going to set off the trap at any minute now. I'm going to shoot you if—"

The gun flies out of his hand as Techno kicks it in the air. His eyes are wide and crazed, and his hands are covered with the blood pouring out of Taylor's wound. For once, Taylor seems to be the one whose petrified.

At this point, the vehicle has already driven out from the parking lot, and they are headed towards an unknown section of the forest.

"NO!" He screeches, letting go of his grip on Taylor. He pounces onto of Sparklez in an attempt of taking the wheel.

"TURN BACK! TURN THE HELL BACK! DON'T LET THEM DIE! YOU CAN'T LET THEM DIE!!"

His arms are fighting over the steering wheel, but Sparklez isn't letting go of his hold.

"You crazy bitch!"

He feels a foot pound to his side, probably from Taylor, and he feels himself plummeting over the vehicle's rails.

Technoblade lands with a heavy *THUD!* against the rocky gravel, rolling across the floor. Both knees and lower legs are grazed from the fall, and he pushes himself up using his elbows.

"No, no, no, no, no! COOPER!"

He staggers up with shaky and bruised legs, running towards the building which was impossibly way too far away. But all common sense and logic has left him at this point, mind empty with only one clear goal:

Save them.

He trips over his own foot and falls down again, and starts crawling like a zombie with amputated legs.

*I can still save them. I have enough time. I can still—*

A burst of smoke and fire clouds his vision.

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Like watching a movie on mute, Techno's eyes are wide as he watches the building before him ignite in flames. His ears are ringing abnormally loud.

While there are a lot of trees covering the place, it wasn't enough to block his entire view of the now in-ruins hospital.

He freezes. Surely they managed to escape. They couldn't be...

But despite what he's trying to tell himself, he feels tears already beginning to well up and sting in his eyes. He bites his lip to try hold it back.

He hears his phone buzz once, but it's a different type of buzz than usual.

But he doesn't check.

He already knows what it will say.

He feels his voice catch in his throat, and a burning sensation begins to tingle.

Then all at once, a profound wave of heartbreak and regret crashes over him, and he lets out an ugly cry before finally bursting into tears.

He breaks into loud, gut-wrenching sobs as he covers his face with shaking, bloody hands. It was a type of pain he's never felt before; like as if his heart had been torn apart. It's a terrible feeling.

He's only known them for a few days, but in those few days he's developed a type of friendship he's never made before.

"They can't be dead!" He hears himself scream behind choked sobs, collapsing to the floor, "*THEY CAN'T BE DEAD IT'S NOT FAIR!"*

He screams and cries and doesn't stop until his throat is raw and dry, and centuries pass before he eventually cries himself to melancholic sleep.

# ➳ CHAPTER 12: purple tie

**chapter 12 ; purple tie**
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***TECHNOBLADE***

He wakes up to the sound of his phone buzzing. He's about to reach over and grab it when he remembers what happened last night.

Flashbacks of Travis, Cooper, and the explosion replay over and over in the back of his mind, and he shuts his eyes tightly.

*Don't think about it.*

He refuses to check his phone in dread of what it would say. Instead, he sits up and takes a look around him.

Apparently at some point, he must have fallen asleep in the middle of this forest. It was harder to see things in the dark, but now that it was daytime, his surroundings seem much more different than before. The trees weren't as intimidating and nerve-wracking as before, but it was rather tranquil and somehow relaxing.

His train of thoughts are interrupted as he hears some distant yelling. Quickly, he stumbles up and shoves his phone in his pocket. Luckily, he still has his backpack, though he no longer has his gun.
He makes his way over to where the noise is coming from. He wasn't close enough to make out what was being said, but he definitely knew there was more than one person.

He walks cautiously through the forest until he reaches a wide hedge of bushes. Bending down, he whacks a few out of his way and creates a small clearing through them.
Behind the bushes is the corner of the street, which belongs to what seems like a small town. Over at the other end of the road was two people arguing.

"Where is he?!" Yells one boy, holding the other by the collar. It doesn't take long for Technoblade to recognise who he is:

*It's number 5. Sneeg.*

"Dude I swear I don't know!"

The other boy is wearing a white collar T-Shirt, with a black jacket tied around his waist. He's wearing black dress pants and a purple tie.

"Yes you do know," Sneeg growls, "I'm not stupid. My diary told

me both you and 1 were here. Are you just saying that's just a *coincidence?"*

"Yeah!"

"Bullcrap!"

*Both you and 1? Wait, I'm 1. He's looking for me!*

"I- I swear I'm not lying!" Purple tie stammers, raising both his hands, "I really have no idea who you're even talking about! So, uh, c-can you let me go now, please?"

"Let you go?" Sneeg scoffs, "What part of 'fight to the death to become God' do you not understand?"

"Uh, how about we sort something out? Yeah, let's negotiate something? We can truce! I swear on my life I won't try to kill you if you let me go! My friend and I won't—"

"Your friend scammed me into buying off an *airgun* in exchange for my *entire backpack! I have NO money OR food!!"*

Sneeg pulls out an empty airgun from his pocket and waves it threateningly in his face.

"He fucking scammed me dude! And you think I'm gonna let you get away with that for the second time?"

Something about the way Purple Tie talks reminds him of himself when he was first confronted. Scared. Frail. Like there's no way to get out of this situation.

He's been there before. It's a daunting feeling; an overwhelming sense of inferiority you'd never want to experience again.

Purple Tie's lips quiver from under Sneeg's grasp, looking at him with anguish in his eyes.

"Listen, if you let me go I promise I can give you back your bag! Schlatt's a half-wit idiot, but if I talk to him he will return it without hesitation! I swear I will—"

Before he can finish, he's thrown aggressively down onto the pavement ground. Techno hears himself gasp.

Purple Tie lets out a slow, pained grunt as he lands on his side. His hand weakly shoots up and covers his mouth to stop himself from screaming— or crying— he couldn't tell.

With his shaking shoulders being an exception, Purple Tie isn't moving.

Sneeg pulls out a dagger.

"If you think I'm going to.. Wait, wh— AGH!"

Sneeg's eyes grow wide as he gets knocked to the ground. That's probably because Technoblade has emerged from the bushes and ran into him.

Kicking down Sneeg, Techno swiftly bends down, grabbing as he lifts up Purple Tie under his arms. His head is spinning, and he's not thinking straight at all. But then again, within the time of just this

week, he's already managed to kill somebody, run through a building full of blood, and watch his friends explode; so when has there been a time when his head *wasn't* spinning?

He quickly drags Purple Tie through the bushes, and throws him behind a tree (as if he hasn't been thrown around enough).

Technoblade crawls beside him and exhales deeply. Hopefully, Sneeg won't be able to spot them. He turns to Purple Tie, whose eyes and mouth are wide open.

"You saved m—?"

Techno's hand flies over his mouth before he is able to finish the sentence. His voice trails off as he glances below at his hand.

He turns to Techno with a fleeting, wild look in his glazed-over, slate blue eyes; he's flooded with both confusion, panic and relief, as he looks to Techno not as an enemy— but as a potential ally.

Though, Techno isn't returning the gaze.

Instead, his back is facing toward him as he is peering beside the tree. Techno's eyes harden as he focuses his stare on the now-standing-up boy beyond the walls of bushes.

Sneeg is now up on both feet, dusting himself off and getting a steadier grip on his weapon. His eyes dart back and forth, coruscating in pure rage and exasperation. But his bodily movements said otherwise—like a drunk person trying to balance on a tightrope, his body is vaguely swaying.

An unanticipated shout escapes from the opposite side of the street. Shortly following the noise, two boys run out from the corner of the suburb and begin making their way over to Sneeg.

The one in front has raven black hair, with a navy blue hood and jeans to add to his dark theme. While Techno can't make out his expression, he's able to notice that he's wearing an eyepatch.

The boy running just a few steps behind him is also wearing a hood, except in contrast to the other's colours, his is green with golden-yellow stripes wrapping around. His hair is a honey brown, similar to Techno's, and he's wearing a bright, golden belt.

One they reach a close enough distance, they start talking to Sneeg, though Technoblade is too far away to hear their conversation.

"What do you think they're saying?" Purple Tie whispers curiously, like as if he were a child gazing upon animals in a zoo exhibit. Well, they sort of *were* animals in a zoo exhibit.

Purple Tie is leaning over Technoblade, also watching from behind the tree.

"I don't know," Techno responds bluntly, eyes fixated on the group, "but something tells me they aren't allies."

Blue hood guy takes a step forward and yells accusingly at Sneeg,

but the only word he manages to hear is 'kingdom'. For once, Sneeg looks more frightened than his victim, and that's saying something.

"You think he's going to kill us?" Purple Tie asks, voice low but sounding slightly on edge. Techno shakes his head.

"I think he's got bigger problems than us right now."

Silence hangs in the air between them and the two just sit there, watching and listening in on the argument going on in the distance, which (thankfully) makes the silence less awkward. After a minute or so, Purple Tie whispers again.

"... Yeah, you're right."

*Bit of a late response there, dude.*

Techno slowly slides a hand in his pocket, and he feels his phone vibrate. It must have been buzzing like mad for the past few minutes, which surprises him how easily he's forgotten about it... Until now.

Purple Tie seems to notice it, too.

"Dude, your phone—"

"Yeah, I know"

"Are you gonna check it?"

He turns away from the argument and looks at him in the eyes.

"No"

"Why?"

Techno opens his mouth to respond when somebody suddenly howls; he quickly turns back to the fighting boys and Green hood guy seems to be tackling Sneeg to the ground.

"About time," he mutters to nobody in particular.

Sneeg throws a punch at Green, and Green throws a punch back. Before you knew it, the three are wrestling and attacking each other, punches and kicks thrown all over the place. Now would probably be the good chance to run away, but something about the fight seems to draw Techno in, and he finally realises why fights are so entertaining to watch.. That is, if you're not involved.

"We should go now," Purple Tie whispers into his ear, like as if read his mind.

"Yeah..."

But they sat there and kept watching, anyway.

Then out of nowhere, Blue pulls out a metal handgun and aims it at his target; his lips part and he yells out something inaudible before pulling the trigger, splitting the sound waves and atmosphere in half to form a gunshot about as loud as a motorcycle passing.

That's when Techno quickly gets up and runs, realising now or never was the time to escape. To his luck, Blue and Green seem to didn't want to pick another fight, and he was unfollowed.

At least, he *thought* he was unfollowed.

When Technoblade thought he had ran far enough, he doubles over with his hands on his knees, catching his breath.

"Hey, why do you run so fast?!"

Purple Tie runs up from behind him, completely exhausted. Techno jumps a little.

"Why'd you follow me?"

"Why do you think?" Purple Tie pants, leaning against a tree, "You saved my life, I don't really know why, but you did. Aren't we.. Allies?"

*Allies.* The word perpetrates through him like a bullet to the heart. He hasn't heard— or even thought of— that word since the day he met Cooper and Travis. And to hear it coming from someone else... It sounded strange, and he suddenly feels like he's betraying them.

He looks down to the grassy ground. He *did* save him.. But *why?*

Purple Tie's phone buzzes, saving him from answering. He frantically searches his pockets before pulling out a phone equipped an odd phone case, which had a picture of light blue pants with.. A mouth? Yeah, weird.

His jaw drops as he reads what presumably was a future message.

"You're... Technoblade?! Like, *The Blood God?"*

Techno shrugs. "Guess so"

"You're the guy 5 was trying to find!"

Purple Tie's eyes grow wide and he starts freaking out, though Techno's unsure if it's out of excitement or fear.

"And-And, you're a hitman, right?"

He's technically not, but he nods his head anyway because he would like to think that he is.

"Oh my god, oh my god!"

Purple Tie's face sparks up with delightment and he jumps around like a fangirl before running to Technoblade, both hands grabbing his shoulders. He's a bit shorter than Techno, so he's looking slightly up at him.

"That means you know everything about guns, right!? Does that mean you help us? Please!?"

"Help with what?" Techno replies, mildly confused.

Purple Tie steps back and breathes out before continuing. "We don't have any guns, or any good weapons. Me and my teammate split up to try and find a place we can buy guns or something, but even then we don't have any money. Schlatt insisted me that he could just talk the manager into buying him a gun, but I told him that's not as easy as it sounds, and—"

He stops after seeing the blank expression on Techno's face. "Oh,

yeah. Schlatt's my teammate."

"Can't you guys just loan a gun?"

"We're sort of legally not allowed to own a gun," Purple Tie's shoulders slump for a minute, before he stands upright again. "But *you* are! So could you help us get some! Right?"

He looks at him pleadingly. Techno's phone buzzes again, urging him to check. Purple Tie's eyes avert down to his pocket, and then back up to Techno.

"Why aren't you checking your phone?" He asks, not out of suspicion, but out of worry.

Techno's eyes flicker, showing a hint of pained misery.

"Is it because you think your friends died?"

He feels his heart stop at the words, and they start replaying itself over in his head.

*'Is it because you think your friends died?'*

How did he know? He's never heard of a case when a diary can tell people's emotions.

While the statement has stunned him, he figures there is no point in questioning how he know, and instead he embraces it.

He's at a loss for words, so instead he just nods vaguely. Purple Tie goes quiet for a moment, before talking quietly again.

".. I think you should check your phone."

It was something he's been trying to avoid for a while now, but something about the candid and genuine way he says this makes him find himself sliding his hand into his pocket, fishing to grab hold of his phone. As soon as he feels the cold and plastic phone case brush against his fingers, he feels his heartbeat quicken. Every inch of him is screaming for him to stop, but his head is telling him to check it.

So he does.

*Play with your head, not your heart.*

With shaking hands, he pulls out his phone. He shoots Purple Tie a concerned look, in which he responds with a nod. He feels his pulse pumping wildly throughout the veins in his wrists.

He turns on the phone and scrolls up.

✧ ◡ ◦ ✖ ◦ ◡ ✧

*NUMBER 11 HAS EXPLODED*
*NUMBER 11 HAS REACHED A **DEAD END***

Even though a part of him deep down already knew what the message would read, seeing it with his own eyes hits harder. He feels his heart shatter into a million pieces, and he reads the words over and over again, wishing it said something else.

*Cooper's dead. I killed Cooper. We were supposed to stick together, but I didn't. I killed him.*

He reads the other messages on his phone, looking for Travis' dead end sign. But to his shock, he can't find it. Narrowing his eyes as he leans closer to the screen, he focuses his stare on his phone. He scrolls up and down, navigating for the big, bold words that announce one's passing.

He sees a message:

*NUMBER 5 HAS BEEN SHOT BY NUMBER 9.*

*NUMBER 5 REACHED A **DEAD END***

Sneeg was dead. *About time.*

He scrolls through earlier on, but he doesn't seem to be able to find any other death messages.

"He's alive," Purple Tie breathes, breaking the silence between them. Techno's eyes flutter to meet his, and the brown haired boy is looking at him with a sincere and hopeful look in his face. He's holding his phone in his right hand, and with his left, he reaches it out to Techno.

"I can make you a deal. Schlatt's diary can tell you just about anything. If you can help us get guns, then he may be able to track down and find your friend."

*Find my friend.*

Even though he just found out one of his friends have died, a weird feeling of relief floods inside of him. Travis is *alive?* And not only that, but he could potentially reunite with him once again? Those words feel almost too good to be true.

But how was he alive, strikes him as the bigger question. Though, the diary doesn't lie; if he had died, the phone would have said so. But what were the odds of a child-like boy like Travis surviving an explosion? It was gravely slim— no, almost impossible. It doesn't make any sense. But at least he's alive, and that's all that matters.

"Travis is alive," Techno gasps, and it suddenly feels as if he had just dropped 100 tonnes worth of weights off his chest. A part of him is vacantly pitiful for his friend's death, but at the same time— a stronger and more passionate side of him is relieved and glad. One of them survived.

And he may be able to know exactly where he is.

"Travis is alive!" Techno exclaims, running over to Purple Tie as he unexpectedly embraces him in relief. "Oh my god, he's alive! He survived!"

It doesn't take him even a second to think about the deal. "It's a deal! Oh god, thank you, Purple Tie!"

Purple Tie's face flusters a little, though confused by the praise since technically he almost got him killed. Nonetheless, he cracks a

smile at the creative nickname the blood god has given him.

"You can call me Connor," He says, grinning as Techno releases from the hug.

"Right, Connor," Techno slides his phone back into his pocket as he steps back. They trade passive smirks as he re-adjusts his grip on his backpack.

"What are we waiting for?" Techno says, "Let's go get some guns"

# 【 GOD "ENCOUNTER" #3 】

**GOD "ENCOUNTER" #3**

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**THE CURRENT CHART:**

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***GOD***

"Things are getting... Somewhat interesting," God says, laying back on his reclined chair as he watches the screen.

"Interesting?!" yells another voice. Beside God stood his annoying but loyal assistant, YmFk. Or in english, it is pronounced as "Yimf". The K is silent.

"How can you find people killing each other *interesting?!"*

"You give me a headache."

YTZk (pronounced as Yetz) walks up from behind.

"What are you talking about? This is just about the most entertaining thing I've ever seen since the day I died."

"You've only seen the latest 30 minutes of it!"

"I know!"

YTZk puts a hand on God's armrest as he leans on it.

"Besides, if you actually used that thing in your head they call a 'brain' for once in your eternal life, you would have *known* that we had no other choice, ■■■■■[illegible]

YTZk shoots him an insulting look, but YmFk doesn't seem to pick up on his mock.

"Yeah, but he's God. Shouldn't he be able to stop it from happening? Can't he do anything?"

"If I could do anything, I would have fired you," God snaps, glaring at what he sees as a pure embodiment of stupidity. "And you *know* I can't."

Believe it or not, even a God has its limits. Especially this God. The most powerful form of life beyond any of mortal existence was not in fact God — It was the Spirits. The Spirits that lie deep within the depths of the galaxy of this realm. The Spirits that made him God. The New God of this reality; The New God who ruled the world. A God with a type of undefinable sort of power; The power to do anything...

Except for getting rid of his assistants.

He feels his heart aching as flashbacks of the past replay in his

head. He's miserable. He's been miserable for centuries, living in the constant guilt of being wrongfully crowned.

"So what happened while I was gone this whole time?" YTZk asks, leaning beside God as he watches the screen.

God snaps out of it, re-positioning himself on his seat as he clears his throat.

"There are 11 players left. You missed out on a lot, Yetz."

The two assistants sit beside God and watch the series of events play out on the big screen. God snaps his fingers, and he switches the screen to Technoblade's perspective.

He's standing inside of what appears to be a store; packed with many various types of guns sitting on towering shelves. He's with his newly found ally, ConnorEatsPants, and they are both talking to two people. One looks to be the manager of the store, while the other was a shorter man in a suit and tie. His eyebrows are furrowed, appearing to be arguing with the manager. Technoblade is holding a gun in his hands, also in on the conversation. ConnorEatsPants is pointing at—

"Connor and Jschlatt" YmFk intertupts, watching the screen carefully as if it were a really intriguing book.

"The one that said he'll 'beat my fucking ass', " God's hisses dully. His stern, but sinister stare is unamused, yet is sharp enough to slice through metal.

Whom of a human has the morality to threaten a *God?*

"We'll see whose ass is beaten after their fate has been *decided"*

A burst of rage escapes from his chest and spreads like fire through his veins, as he stretches his hand, bawling it into a firm fist. In an instant, a black aura surrounds his fist as his glare turns to Jschlatt. On the screen, Jschlatt's hands shoot to around his neck, and he falls to his knees in a struggle for air.

"Wait!"

YmFk grabs God's wrist, panicked. His fist loses it's composure, and it returns to the regular state of his hand.

"You can't kill him! You can't just change the game's fate because he made you mad!"

God blinks from under his mask, and his anger vanishes.

*He's right. Jschlatt's fate is already miserable as it is. Changing it because of my emotions is irrational and could lead to the potentiality of flipping the entire game. I can't afford to risk that.*

".. Whatever."

"It was just getting good!" YTZk yells in the background.

"Hey, how about we check what happened with that kid who survived the explosion?" YmFk suggests, changing the topic quickly. God nods vaguely.

They switch tabs.

✧ ⁘ ✧

Number 12 is walking along a dirt pathway surrounded with looming-over, tall trees. In front of him is a boy in a grey hood, wearing a mask.

Number 13. Joko.

During the timespan of the explosion and now, Travis has found an unlikely ally. But the look on 12's face says otherwise — A look of despondency and vulnerability. Unhappiness.

While 13's facial expression cannot be told through his mask, God can tell by his upright posture that he is confident and determined. Then, Travis opens his mouth, and he starts talking.

"Cooper, aw man" YTZk randomly says.

God ignores him and assumes it's another one of those "memes" they made up in the human realm.

He turns up the volume on Travis and Joko to listen to their conversation:

"Joko, please. We have to find him—"

"Are you fucking insane dude?" 13 snaps, turning around, "Were you even *listening* to what I told you before?"

Joko grabs his wrist and points down to the boy's leg, which is wrapped in damp, bloody bandages from the bullet.

"You see that?" Joko spat, "That happened because he couldn't *protect you.* He — your so-called 'friend' — *left you.* He doesn't *care about you."*

"B-But.. We're friends—"

" 'B-But' friends *care* for each other. Friends have *each other's backs. Always."*

Joko leans in to him, speaking through gritted teeth as he emphasizes each word with a pause. *"Friends. Never. Abandon you. No matter what."*

Tears begin to well up inside Travis' eyes. "H-He.."

"Travis," Joko says in a softer tone, releasing his grip from his wrist, "Techno *left* you to save himself. Isn't that selfish of him? If he really cared about you, don't you think he would have stayed back and helped? Or called you as soon as he could to make sure you were OK? But what did he do? *Nothing.* And that's not what real friends do. I saved your life, and I don't even know you. What has he *ever* protected *you* from?"

Travis falls silent.

"Exactly."

Joko jabs his finger in his own chest. "Your my friend, Travis. And I

promise I will protect you like nobody ever has. I swear on my **life** that **I** will *never leave you like he did."*

He nods, trying to swallow back the urge to burst into tears. A small droplet of water falls from his eye.

"Technoblade doesn't care about you; *But I do.* Now lets go find the guys who killed Cooper."

---

*My plan is going smoothly. I didn't expect—*

"You're a bad God," YmFk says.

"No way! Seriously? He's a bad God?! Yeah, no fucking shit Einstein! I thought he was just a fucking pastry chef and we were helping him bake a batch yummy-fucking chocolate chip cookies! Thanks for reminding us that we work for an immortal being who doesn't even have the power to fire his own employees!"

"Shut it Yetz, your insults aren't—"

"Sorry-Sorry, what's that? I can't hear you over de sound of me putting my tray of cookies into the ov—"

Both their mouths suddenly snap shut. God is holding out his hand.

"Can't both of you just shut up without me having to mute you for once?"

YTZk shakes his head, and YmFk gives God an apologetic look.

He switches tabs to Numbers 7 & 8.

Number 7 and 8— CaptainSparklez and AntVenom— are camping on a large field beside a forest. AntVenom's shoulder is wrapped in some ragged-looking piece of cloth. They both look to be talking about their next moves.

Sparklez shows his phone to Ant, and they both start nodding.

God switches to another tab again.

Numbers 9 and 10 are breaking into stores and markets, stealing and collecting as many supplies as they can. Ryan is holding a bag full of food, while Altrive is trying to get his hands on as many survival kits as he can.

YmFk wants to say something, but then he remembers he can't.

They switch tabs on Number 2 — CallMeCarson.

They see Number 2 finishing off what appears to be a raft of some sort. They watch as Carson lifts up the raft and heaves it into the river. Surprisingly, it doesn't break. Instead, it floats like a regular boat. The fatigue way he moves and how he doesn't pay much attention to his surroundings makes him look almost disconsolate; Perhaps he was still grieving over his friend's death.

They switch tabs to the last perspective — Number 4.

Wilbur Soot is sitting on the ledge of a balcony on a tall apartment building. The evening sunset begins to crack along the

skylines, as if reminding the world that evening was about to arrive. Plastic pluck in his right hand, Wilbur holds his guitar with the other as it rests on his lap. His mouth purses for a moment before opening.

God turns up the volume, curious to see what he is saying. Or rather, what he is singing:

"Back when the trees would never decay,
Sugar canes were only used for books.
There was only ever one type of tree,
Until Notch announced the 1.2!

Then, suddenly, around the world,
Everyone got excited!
Squids would be in Mine—"

"Humans call this music?" God says, switching back to Travis and Joko's screen.

"I liked it!"

Looks like his mute spell wore off. He turns to YmFk, who was pouting at him. God looks at YTZk, and he's playing a game on a.. switch? He's not even going to ask where he got that from.

God's eyes follow back to the large screen, and he watches silently but intently on Travis and Joko.

He takes back what he said about things getting interesting; things are boring. He needs to do something to put the game back on it's edge — a twisted dilemma that will be sure to spice things up and make the game more interesting. Maybe a fight? No, that's not good enough. Something desperate; yearning; *craving* — a powerful enough sense of emotion that it would get everybody hungry for *blood*. Something people will thrive to achieve and won't stop until they get what they want. But what for? It's been millennia since he's been a human; and he's forgotten how it feels. How it feels to want desires. Emotions. A heart.

"Yetz, what do humans like?"

"Nintendo switches."

"I can't give them a nintendo switch."

"Oh, you mean those people fighting to the death? Yeah I don't know, maybe they would like to not die or something."

That's it! *Survive!* If there was one thing they would want in a situation like this, it would be to survive!

God gets up from his seat and walks forward, opening his arms. Spinning around, he faces his two assistants.

"I've decided to spice things up a bit!" God announces.

"What?!" YmFk's mouth opens wide, but YTZk doesn't look up from his video game. God furrows his eyebrows and evaporates his nintendo switch.

"I've decided to spice things up a bit," God repeats.

"How?"

He slaps his hands together and smiles maliciously.

"I'm going to set a bounty on someone. And whoever kills them... Gets to be freed from Mirai SMP."

# ! SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT !

Hello readers! This is not a chapter to the book, but rather, a very important announcement.

Me and @InnocentFurball have decided to make a discord server about Mirai SMP!

The server is basically just updates on the story, your theories / ideas, fanart, stuff about the series and just vibin in general.

*[ LINK IS TEMPORARILY REMOVED, SORRY.*
*HOWEVER IF YOU REALLY WANT TO JOIN YOU CAN DM ME ]*

It would be awesome to see some people join, it will be fun :)

Plus I love when people come up with theories it gets me hYPED MAN

but beware:

You may see a lot of out-of-context screenshots from upcoming chapters,,,

Okay thats about it, cya nerds

# ➳ CHAPTER 14: schlatt & co

**chapter 14 ; schlatt & co**
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***TECHNOBLADE***
It all started a couple hours ago when Technoblade had first met Connor. After they escaped from the forest, they ended up navigating their way to Jschlatt, who was in a local gun shop trying to negotiate a deal for obtaining a gun. The first thing Technoblade had heard when they entered the store was Jschlatt threatening the manager.

"Listen here, Charlie the Slimepopsicle or whatever the fuck your nametag says," Jschlatt had said, "If you don't completely, utterly revoke that statement you just made about not giving me a gun, I will hire my personal lawyer to sue both you and shut down your company! I don't like repeating myself, but just for this one sake I will; I am in the middle of a life-threatening crisis I was dragged into by a God and that will potentially lead me dead within the next few days all because your *arrogant* ass won't allow me to loan these guns!"

Charlie blinked, unamused, before calmly stating: "You mean you expect me to believe that God made you participate in the hunger games?"

"Yes!"

To Jschlatt's relief, Technoblade had stepped in the conversation at the perfect moment, showing him his ID which he had conveniently left in his pocket. He managed to successfully loan 3 automatic handguns, which ended up making Jschlatt's so-called 'negotiation skills' look pathetic.

And now, the three boys are sitting inside of an old warehouse located only a block away from the gun shop. Jschlatt is sitting alone above a large storage container inside the warehouse, leaving Connor and Techno sitting together on the ground.

"Dude, thank you so much," Connor utters, reloading and setting up his newly loaned handgun. "I didn't think you'd actually help us. You just saved our lives— *Twice!"*

Connor looks up and beams at Techno, before returning his focus back to his guns.

"No problem," Techno replies, leaning back against a large

container, "Nothings worse than bringing a knife to a gun fight."

He scoffs to himself as he remembers what had happened the first day of Mirai SMP.

*And I learnt that the hard way.*

He looks at Connor, whose attention is concentrated on his adjustment to the handguns. His hands move swiftly as he places the mag. inside the pistol. For a guy only 16 years old, he seems to know his way with guns pretty well.

"So.." Techno begins, remembering why he did this in the first place, "What about the deal? Do you think you can find him?"

Connor finishes his adjusting to the weapons, and he places them back in Jschlatt's bag before turning to Technoblade.

"Totally," He says, pointing to Jschlatt, "That's why he's over there. He's trying to find a way to find his location."

Technoblade raises an eyebrow as he watches Jschlatt, working on his phone. "How does his diary work?"

Connor purses his lips for a moment before continuing.

"His diary tells his future in the form of deals. He can basically find out whatever information he wants, but it's in the form of a bargain. If he wants something, he has to sacrifice something of equal value."

*A diary that forces you to sacrifice something?*

He's never heard of anything like that.

"Fuck!" Jschlatt yells from the other side. He aggressively throws his shoe near a pile of boxes, standing up from the container.

"What?" Connor asks.

Jschlatt jumps off the crater and shoots a glare at Techno, before turning back to Connor. "Connor, give me my gun"

"Oh. You got to be fucking kidding me."

Connor, seemingly annoyed, gets up and throws him one of the pistol he just reloaded. Could this be part of the bargain Connor was talking about?

"What's happening?" Techno asks, standing up beside Connor. Jschlatt ignores him, throwing the gun onto the concrete below him. Taking a deep breath, he pulls out his phone and shines it's flashlight on the gun.

Like as if he was taking a photo, he presses a button. In an instant, a white blink in the symbol of a crown flashes on the gun—the illumination blinds Techno for a minute, before the gun disintegrates from the ground; turning into nothing but a pile of ashes.

He stands there, mouth open as he watches Jschlatt's completely unfazed expression.

Jschlatt's phone then buzzes, and he reads out the message out

loud:

"***DEAL PAID.***

*NUMBER 12 IS AT A MOTEL NEARBY A LOCAL MARKET LOCATED AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TOWN. NUMBER 12 IS ACCOMPANIED WITH NUMBER 13. THEY'LL DEPART NEXT MORNING."*

Connor looks at Techno and grins, as Jschlatt slips his phone back into his pocket; he turns around and raises his eyebrows, awaiting for some sort of excited response from Techno.

Instead, Technoblade points to his shoe on the floor a few feet away from them.

"Don't forget your shoe."

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"Has he answered yet?" Connor asks him.

The sun is setting beyond the horizon of the beach's crystal clear ocean. The group of three boys are sitting on logs placed conveniently along the sand. After venturing for hours (because Jschlatt had refused to run) and discussing their plans, they had decided to camp the night at a beach— So then, in the morning, they would go find Travis. Along the way, he's also managed to discover Connor and Jschlatt's stats; With Connor's being:

*STRENGTH*: 3/5 *INTELLIGENCE*: 3/5 *TEAMWORK*: 4/5

And Schlatt's:

*STRENGTH*: 1/5 *INTELLIGENCE*: 5/5 *TEAMWORK*: 3/5

And while Techno hadn't really bonded with them as well as he first did with Cooper and Travis, they would have to do. After all, they were his last and only hope.

"No," Techno lets out a frustrated sigh, and he puts down his phone. He can't go one minute without worrying about Travis, especially now that he's found out he's with Number 13.

"Well that's no surprise," Jschlatt shrugs, stretching out his hands for warmth to the bonfire in the middle of the group, "13 is ranked triple 5, and he's allied with the game's weakest player. He's also obviously not stupid enough to leave him with his phone on, so he's probably kidnapped."

"You think he's going to kill him?" Techno inquires, averting his gaze to Jschlatt's; his brown eyes glimmered hazel in the reflection of the fire as his dark brown hair hangs over his face.

"If he wanted to kill him, he'd be dead already," He says simply, "He probably wants to use him for something."

Connor speaks up. "But for what?"

"How am I supposed to fucking know, dude? I'm a businessman, not Sherlock Holmes."

Everyone goes quiet, and the only sounds to be heard was the

vague crackling of the fire.
"So.." Connor hums eventually, "Technoblade, you got any friends from outside the game?"

Techno leans against the log, as he sits down on the sand. The question had come out of nowhere, and it takes him a few moments to think.
In truth, he doesn't actually remember. He remembers vaguely receiving a similar question from Cooper and Travis; and his answer still remains the same.

No, he doesn't.
But the word feels odd on his tongue— and something about the term 'friends' feels somehow familiar. But he can't recall ever having any.

"Not really. What about you guys?"

"Well, I actually knew Schlatt before the game started."

Jschlatt nods, agreeing with Connor. Techno raises his eyebrows. "Really? That's pretty coincidental."

"I know, right? We've known each other for years. It all started with—"

"Schlatt & Co."

They both turn to look at Jschlatt, who had been silent for a while. He's holding something in his right hand, but Technoblade cannot see.
Jschlatt's eyes don't turn away from the fire.

"Schlatt & Co was what brought us together. A company founded myself, of course, and co-founded by my partner. Connor."

Connor smiles warmly to himself, as he is filled with memories from his past.
"Remember that time when Ty told you that you had a dick on your back, Schlatt? And then you started going all like 'what the fuck!' ?"

And for the first time, Techno sees Jschlatt laugh. He stands up.
"And that time when you killed your own bird because you gave it a cookie! Ha, you fucking retard!"

"Oh my god, yeah! And then when Gold got a pet bird named Italy and you told him to 'get this fucking failed country out of my way' and you just kicked him? Or her? I can't remember it's gender actually"

Techno laughs a little at this. "Damn, Schlatt. You kicked a bird? That's not really cash money of you."

"Hey shut up, at least I didn't kill him with a fucking cookie," He says, as he walks over to sit beside Techno. Techno swears he can feel his hand touch his waist.

Connor suddenly gasps, and stands up excitedly. "Oh, oh! Remember that time when you had to run for a whole week if the

company managed to raise $1000?!"

"Woah! Schlatt can... *run?!"*

"Don't remind me. I deeply regret making that deal."

"Fuck yeah he can run, he's faster than *me!* It was the funniest fucking thing ever!"

Techno blinks, turning to the flustered Jschlatt as he repeats himself. "You can *run?"*

He feels a little drowsy, probably from the warmth of the fire.

"I don't like to call it 'running', but rather 'walking fast'."

"See, he just confessed that he can run!"

"Connor Eats Pants, you are profoundly mistaken, there is a vast difference in confession and spitting facts."

Connor starts talking, but for some reason Techno cannot hear. Connor's words become muffled and jumbled.

His vision begins to blur.

He tries to open his mouth to speak, but for some reason he doesn't have the energy to do so.

His mind begins to fog, and he feels his eyes closing. He can see a hand move to his face.

The last thing he hears before falling unconscious are the words "I'm sorry."

***JSCHLATT***

His hand slides across the sand, and his fingers coil tightly around the handle of the pistol. With heavy arms, he grabs it as he crawls weakly.

"Are you going to do it?" Connor whispers.

Jschlatt can only guess it's around 1 in the morning. He's injected the anaesthesia inside of him a couple of hours ago, so it definitely should have kicked in by now.

He had collected the serum earlier that morning on his way to the local gun shop at a chemist, just in case he would have to use it for a situation like this.

His glazed-over eyes follow fatiguely to meet his partner—Connor's.

"I have to"

He stumbles up to his legs, the gun firmly held in his left hand. With slow steps, he walks quietly towards Techno. Connor awaits beside the tree behind him, blue eyes glimmering in the moonlight as he watches Jschlatt intently.

Jschlatt stops and aims the pistol at Techno's head.

His right hand reaches up to clasp around his left. He's holding the gun in both his hands.

*I have to kill him.*

His finger inches to the trigger, but stops. The air around him freezes; icy air prickling at the surface of his skin. Everything goes silent, and the only thing he hears is the pounding of his heartbeat inside his chest.

He looks down at his hands; they're shaking wildly.

*You have to kill him, Schlatt. You have to. You promised Connor that you'd help him win if you could kill him.*

"Connor," He whispers hoarsely, voice trembling. Sweat pours down from his forehead.

"Yeah?"

"Why don't you want to be free?"

Connor goes quiet.

"... I can't bring myself to kill him. I like him, Schlatt. And not only that, *he's saved my life.*. If I killed him, I won't *ever* forgive myself for that."

He nods slowly and bites his quivering lip as he looks back to Technoblade, who is sleeping peacefully. He cocks the gun and moves his finger to the trigger.

*Pull. Pull the trigger, Schlatt.*

He gulps, and feels his throat choke on his own saliva.

*If you kill him, you can be free. Kill the Bounty.*

The muzzle of the gun clicks softly against the back of Techno's head. He waits in silence, each second feeling like an eternity as he tries to push himself to shoot him.

They both await in silence. Connor shuts his eyes tightly.

*Click.*

The gun falls from Schlatt's hands and onto the floor. He breathes shakily.

"I can't."

He hangs his head low. "I can't do it, Connor. I just can't. *I can't fucking kill him."*

*... Why can't I kill him?*

# ➳ CHAPTER 15: un avant-goût de la France

**chapter 15;  un avant-goût de la France**

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***DIARY USER 12 — TRAVIS***

The door is left slightly open, leaving a crack in the entrance to inside the lit-up bathroom. His room is illuminated by the dim glow of his bedside lamp.

He's lying on his bed, unable to sleep as he is watching from his covers he sees Joko slip inside the bathroom.

He can't see much, but he has a perfect view of Joko, who is staring at himself in the mirror with his hands gripped tightly around the ledges of the sink.

Slowly, Joko takes off his mask and turns on the sink; and for the first time Travis sees his face— in the reflection of the bathroom mirror.

Behind his mask is the face of a normal boy. A boy with wide, teary bright, blue eyes.

His scruffy hair is a blonde to pink ombre, his bangs matted over his forehead. He sees Joko's hand run down to his pocket, and pulls something out. Travis can't see what it is, but it looks like a note of some sort.

He unfolds the note as he clutches it tightly in his hands, staring at it for a minute. He covers his mouth with his hand.

It's silent, except for the sounds of running water pouring from the tap.

And then his shoulders start to shake.

*He's crying.*

Before Travis knows it, he sees Joko break down in quiet, pained sobs as he holds the note to his chest. He must have thought that the water would drown out his cries. But it doesn't.

Travis stays hushed and watches attentively, while Joko uses his right hand to splash water onto his face.

For the first time, Travis feels sorry for him; he's hit with a heartfelt wave of compassion and pity, despite him not knowing his situation. He wishes he could walk over to and comfort him. He wants to help— Do something, *anything.*

But he can't. He's too scared; too scared to even move. He doesn't know why he's scared of him— after all, he had saved his life. The least he can do is make him feel like he's not alone.

His train of thoughts is interrupted as a louder, raw wail escapes from Joko's mouth. The note is placed on the bench beside him now, and his hands are covering his wet and tear-stained face.

He cries for what Travis can only assume were a good 30 minutes.

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***DIARY USER 13 — JOKO***

"Jesus, how desperate is this guy?" He mutters, scrolling through the 20 missed calls from 'number 1' on Travis' phone.

It's the morning, and he's waiting outside the motel, leaning against the wall as he waits for Travis to finish packing. He had only booked the motel for 1 night, but it was enough time for him to gather his thoughts and plan out what to do for the day.

On the plus side, he also had an usual dream.

*Or should I say, perhaps an unusual God Encounter?*

Once he had gone to bed, he found himself sucked back into God's lair. Except *he* was the only one there.

He had been greeted with a "good evening" by God himself, before being sat down at a strange conference place. Beside God, was what he called, his 'assistant'.

*Yimf, I think was his name. Odd guy. Almost seems too... sympathetic, to be a demon. If it weren't for the wings and silhouette, I'd be convinced he was real human for sure.*

Apparently there was supposed to be another one, but he wasn't there.

But it turns out, God had revealed some important information to only Joko specifically— drastically *vital* information that could perhaps change *the entire fate of the game.*

*Your life isn't just dependent on your skill. It's also dependent on your phone.*

To put things simply: He had discovered a new aspect of the game. If your phone is destroyed, so is your life.

*I don't have to kill people if I want them to die. I can just snap their phones.*

He holds up Travis' phone in his hand, and smirks.

*With one drop of this phone, Travis could die.*

And that was exactly the sort of power he needs in this game.

"Hey, Joko!"

Joko turns to his left, and he sees Travis waving. He runs out the

entrance of the Motel and towards Joko whilst carrying a grey backpack on his shoulders.

"About time," He grins, casually saluting.

"So," Travis starts, now standing beside Joko, "Where are we going?"

"Like I said the other day— We're gonna get our revenge on 8. Sparklez, I think was his name. If he thinks he can almost kill and be let off guard, he's *dead wrong.*"

But only half of that is true.

He, himself, doesn't want revenge. But rather, he wants *Travis* to have his— He wants Travis to know how it feels to *take revenge*.

*Revenge. It's an odd concept. The idea of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands. It's a controversial belief. A contradicting moral.*

*One of the easiest ways to take joy in the conception of murder is revenge itself.*

As somebody who had formerly worked in the police force, he knows very well how revenge feels.

It's an alive feeling; a sensation beyond what one can define only as pure, accomplished *satisfaction*; the taste of *power* and it's glory of finally giving the person who made you *suffer* a try at their *own medicine.*

Revenge is power. And if he can get Travis to feel this way, he may also get Travis to have a thirst for *blood.*

"Oh, uh, right," Travis replies, his excitement immediately being replaced with reluctance, "We're... Yeah, revenge."

Joko nods scantily, and places a hand on Travis' shoulder after seeing his unease expression. "No, you don't need to worry Travis. Remember that promise I made you the other day? I don't break promises."

His gaze is fixed, locked in with Travis' deep brown eyes, which glimmered vaguely in the morning sun; his stare is steadfast and resolute, as he moves his hand down from his shoulder to his wrist.

"C'mon," He insists, pulling Travis as he starts to walk away from the front of the motel. Just further up ahead of them were a wide path road, with collection of local markets. Earlier today, while packing up, Joko had received a message from his phone saying that Technoblade was trying to track him down. Logically, he would stay back and fight him. But with Travis being his new ally, he decided to leave that for later. Hence, why he decided it would be a good idea to get moving early in the morning.

He doesn't necessarily know where he's going, but he needs to move away from him. Maybe along the way, his diary can detect any players nearby.

Travis is following behind him, quiet for a moment before responding.

"It's.. It's not really that," He murmurs, walking behind Joko, "I know you can, protect me. It's just.. Well, do I *have* to kill him?"

Without turning back, Joko answers solemnly. "No. I can do that part. You can just stay behind me, okay?"

Travis looks like he wants to say something, but instead he keeps quiet.

The two walk in silence for a few minutes, along the pathway through the markets.

"Hey, Joko. Could we get something to eat?" Travis eventually asks, hands on his stomach. Joko stops walking, and turns to Travis.

"I guess so, I should have some leftover cash," Joko shrugs. He looks around—most of the markets around them are either selling clothes, hippie souvenirs, or...

His attention stumbles across a foreign-looking bakery market that says:

*"Un avant-goût de la France".*

"How about a snack from there?" Joko points, and Travis nods excitedly. Almost too enthusiastic for somebody whose on a hunt to help kill someone.

Joko and Travis both run to the store, stepping inside the entrance.

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He breathes in, taking in the tranquil and warm aroma of fresh bread, and sweet cinnamon.

"Bonjour!" calls out a strong french voice from behind the counter.

It's a boy who looks to be about Joko's age. He's wearing an odd, grey eye band over his head, and a dark grey sweater with a white apron.

"I'm good, how about you?" Travis responds, reaching out his hand.

French man shoots him a confused look. "You don't know French, do you?"

"Nope!"

Ignoring their smalltalk, Joko walks up to the counter and slams the bench, grabbing the French man's attention. He looks at the French Man's nametag.

... *A6D.*

"Mr. A6D, what's the cheapest thing you got here?" He demands quickly, a little too aggressively.

A6D blinks, dazed for a complete second, before returning to his

relaxed posture.

"I think you want a baguette," He nods, pointing to a shelf which is selling a stock of baguettes for $1.00 each.

He doesn't bother complaining. Instead, he races over and grabs one, rushing back to the desk as he empties out his wallet.

"Woah, woah," A6D ushes, "What's the rush?"

"Why would you care?" Joko replies.

"Well, I mean. It can't be that bad. Why don't you stay a while? I never get customers."

Travis opens his mouth but Joko interjects.

"We're just running late for.. *my brother's* appointment"

He gestures to Travis. "Now can you give me my food please? I need to—"

"*You're lying.*"

Joko stops. He bites his lip. "No, I'm not."

A6D puts a hand on the bench, inexplicably confident. "Yes you are. You're fighting to the death, aren't you?"

He leans in closer to Joko.

"I believe it's called, '*Mirai SMP'* ?"

"What?" Travis suddenly exclaims, "How did you know..?"

Joko; eyes wide with absolute perplexion— is left speechless against this man.

"Okay, okay. Remember the part when I said I never get customers? That was a lie. I got one last night."

"Do you remember what his name was?" Travis asks.

A6D shrugs. "I think it was Wilson. Or Wilbur, or something. He showed up with a guitar slung over his shoulder, and seemed happy to stick around and eat. He was telling me about it."

He turns to Joko. "Joko, right? Yeah, he was talking to me about you. Says he wants to meet up or something, I think he was looking for you."

Travis muses, and Joko shakes his head. "The musical guy? Why... Uh, do you know why he wants to meet up with me?"

"Got no clue dude."

"Did he say where he was going?" Travis inquires. A6D pauses for a moment, thinking about this.

"Not really, but he did mention about camping the night down south. I would say I feel bad for him spending his last ounce of cash on my food, but I don't."

*Down south? If this guy wanted to meet up with me, wouldn't he have found me by now? Unless his diary is useless in tracking people down.*

"That's fine," Joko eventually says, reaching over for his breadstick. "Thanks for the help, A6D. I have to go now"

"No problem. Goodluck!"

"Thank you, see ya!" Travis waves, already making his way out the exit.

Joko turns around, when a hand grabs forcefully at his wrist.

"Joko," A6D whispers hoarsely, a dramatic change in his tone.

"Wh—"

He tells him one more thing before he leaves:

"*Kill Technoblade.*"

# ➳ CHAPTER 16: four hours ago

**A/N!**
**This chapter is a little different from the rest! For the first time, I'm putting in music! :D**
**I highly recommend reading the chapter with the music on, as I think it would set the mood.**
**anyways, enjoy. :)**

**chapter 16 ; four hours ago**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

*"Auhghh,"*

He holds his head to his hand, and sits up groggily. His vision is hazy and blurred, and he rubs his eyes fatiguely.

*Man, that was... a weird dream.*

He looks around and sees that Connor is still asleep. But Jschlatt's awake — In fact, he looks to have been up all night.

His eyes are bloodshot red as he's staring at the floor. He's sitting on a log beside a tree a few meters away, feet dug into the beach's sand.

"Oh, good morning, uh, Schlatt," Technoblade murmurs, still half asleep as he holds his hand to his head. His head feels funny — It feels as if he's gotten both a century's worth of sleep, but also none at all. His memories of last night are jumbled, for some reason.

"Morning," He hears Schlatt mumble from underneath his breath, eyes still locked on the sand below him.

"Are you okay?" He asks, crawling closer to Schlatt, "You look like you got no sleep."

And for the first time, Schlatt breaks his gaze; he stares at him hard with his glazed-over, glassy eyes.

"I could say the same thing to you," He finally says, wearisome dryness itching away through his voice. His expression is blank and monotonous.

"Nah dude, I had a great sleep," He semi-lies, taking a seat beside Schlatt. The cold morning air pricks at his skin, sending him a fresh tingle up his spine.

Schlatt looks away and opens his mouth, hesitating before speaking.

"Hey, Techno. Do you... *trust me?"*

He's taken a little aback by the question. In truth, he doesn't really *know* if he trusts him. But he's left with no other option.

"Well... Yeah," He recalls, "I mean, I had to put my faith in you that day we made the deal. And you sacrificed a gun to help me find my friend. I think that's something a trustworthy person would do, right?"

'Right' was right. At this point, Techno is really only trying to convince himself this. *Was* this the right choice to make? He doesn't know. He doesn't know if putting his faith in this man was a mistake, or a gift. Was it right?

He could only hope that it was.

"I—.. I guess so."

Techno pauses. "What makes you ask that, anyway?"

Schlatt shakes his head. "It's.. Nothing. I just feel.."

He hesitates for a moment. *".. I just feel like I always let everybody down."*

Another shiver runs up his spine, but this time it's not from the cold. Something about those words strikes something inside of him — and it brings back vivid memories.

Techno lowers his gaze as he's hit with a strong wave of guilt and regret. "Yeah... I know how that feels."

Schlatt looks at him with big eyes.

"You.. *do?"*

He nods slowly, and he feels his throat tighten.*"It was all my fault,"* He murmurs, voice cracked as he's mesmerised as flashbacks from what had happen play in his head, "We were supposed to stick together. *But I left them.* I ran off and *left them* because I let my *damn emotions get the better of me."*

He runs his hand through his hair in an attempt to ease his unsettledness, and he puts his head in his hands. A few seconds of silence pass before Schlatt whispers, finally understanding. *"You think it's your fault Cooper died."*

He doesn't answer, confirming Schlatt's deduction. Schlatt breathes in deeply before continuing.

"Regret. And guilt. It's something that will never leave you until.. You feel like you've owned up for what you've done."

Schlatt closes his eyes, hanging his head low. "I always screw everything up because I'm too afraid to risk anything. No, it's because I'm just a *pussy. I'm a fucking pussy* and because of that I always mess things up and it's always my fault."

Techno looks over at him, and he sees Schlatt on the verge of tears. In an attempt to lighten the mood, he tries to crack a smile.

"Dude, you're talking to the Blood God. That's a risky move to begin with."

"Shut up," He scoffs half-heartedly, eyes still staring to the floor ahead of him, "You're talking to a scammer."

Techno lets out a small laugh. "Guess we're both risking something, huh?"

He swears he can see Schlatt smile as he replies:

"Yeah. Yeah we fucking are, Technoblade."

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It's 1:30PM in the afternoon. Shortly after Techno's conversation with Schlatt, Connor had woken up. They snacked on a sandwich and a bag of chips that Techno had packed, before heading out towards the direction of the Motel. They were walking along the coast of the beach, which was supposedly meant to lead them straight to the whereabouts of the Motel and local markets. The walk had taken an hour or so.

Techno had found himself unusually bonding with Schlatt, who was the last person he had expected to get along with.

*Maybe he's not such a bad guy, after all.*

"Hey, that's weird," Connor says, snapping Techno out of his trance. Connor is examining his phone, which almost makes him trip over a rock washes up on the shore.

"What?" Schlatt and Techno in sync.

"How come my phone hasn't said anything for like, a whole day? But both of yours always buzz? Like, the fuck? Does God just hate me or something?"

"Wouldn't be surprised if he does," Schlatt remarks, shrugging.

"Or, your phone was just on silent the whole time," Techno suggests sarcastically.

"What an absolute, fucking *tool* move. You motherfucker, if you really left your phone on silent, I very well think that you quite literally have just about as much brains as a pile of seaweed."

Connor just rolls his eyes. "No, seriously. Why is my diary so useless?"

Techno muses, all jokes aside as he thinks. "Well, what does your diary tell you, anyway?"

"It just tells me the things in the form of Emotions. Pretty much, if somebody is feeling.. I guess, a particular strong emotion— My diary will tell me why they are feeling that way with either their future or past."

Techno hears himself gasp; It all makes sense, now.

"That's how you knew Travis was alive!"

"Yep!"

Schlatt mutters. "At least you get your information for free,"

"You have a point," Connor smirks, fingergunning at him.

As they walk along the sand, Connor and Schlatt continue talking. Techno stays silent, as his mind ponders.

*What's going to happen after we find Travis?*

It was a question that has been waiting in his mind for some time, now. He figures now is the perfect time to ask.

"Connor, Schlatt," He says, and the two stop talking, "What's gonna happen when.. Well, *when we find Travis?"*

Connor and Jschlatt fall quiet, and they take a minute or two to think about this.

"Well.." Schlatt starts, "I guess that means.. The deal is done, right?"

"Yeah.." Connor adds, "I guess we'll part ways from there. You can unite with your friend again. And me and Schlatt will.. Well, I don't really know. I guess we'll just try surviving."

*Part ways from there.*

It was an answer he is expecting, but an answer not expecting to come out from Connor's mouth. And while it was stupid to think, Technoblade found himself almost *enjoying* their company.

Travis was his main priority, of course. But he has already gotten unanticipatedly fond of the two boys; even if he has only known them for a few days.

*I guess that's what happens when you've been so disconnected from society your whole life.*

"Man," He subconsciously breathes, blinking , "I think I'm actually gonna *miss* you guys once we split up."

Schlatt turns to face him. "I could say the same thing, du—"

He halts to a stop, as Connor interrupts.

"Wait, over there! The motel!"

And he's right— just up ahead, past the borders of the end of the Beach, there's a pathway leading up to a motel.

"Holy crap, you're right!" Techno exclaims, and without wasting a second, he breaks into a full sprint. He runs as fast as his legs can take him, sprinting towards the Motel.

Connor follows behind, running fast but still unable to catch up with Techno's speed.

———

"Hello?!"

Techno bursts through the doors of the entrance to the small motel, panting. A diminutive bell attached to the doorframe rings, grabbing the lady at the counter's attention.

".. Uh," The lady mumbles, "How may I—?"

"*WHY DID YOU HAVE TO RUN?!"*

The lady is interrupted as Connor comes breaking down the door,

which is then followed by a sudden, pained yelp.

"... —Help you..?" The perplexed lady finishes.

Techno walks over to the counter, ignoring Connor as he tries to fix the door back on it's hinges.

"Is there anybody in here with the names 'Joko' and 'Travis'?"

The girl thinks for a moment, before pulling out her notepad. "Joko and Travis, you say? Hmm.."

"Yeah. One of them wears a pink sweater. Dark brown hair. Dog ears. Are they here? Or have they been here, least?"

The lady flips through the pages on the clipboard, scanning through carefully. After a moment, she nods.

"They sound familiar, now that you mention it.. Hm, let's see.. Oh, yes! Joko and Travis— They have booked their stay last night from 7PM to 9AM. They left almost... 4 hours ago."

He feels his heart drop to the bottom of his stomach. *4 hours ago?!*

"W..What?"

"Is there a problem, sir? Would you like me to call their number for you?"

"... *Please."*

The lady dials a number on the telephone; immediately, it goes straight to voicemail.

"Oh, his number is not working."

Connor scoffs from the other side of the room. "No shit, their phones don't work."

"They left *4 hours ago?!"* Techno repeats, "That's... D-Do you know where they went? Do you have *any idea* where they went?!"

The lady shakes her head. "I'm so sorry, they didn't tell me anything."

Techno sighs, as a wave of disappointment crashes over him. They were too late.

"It's okay. Thank you."

He walks out the door, dragging out Connor on the way.

They both walk outside the motel, and they finally see Schlatt in the distance; who remains calmly walking.

"Told you he never runs," Connor deadpans, watching as Schlatt continues to walk. Techno stares hard onto the ground, biting his lip as he concentrates. Travis and Joko had left 4 hours ago. They could have gone *anywhere.* And with out any information on their whereabouts, there was no way to find them.

Either, he could ask Schlatt to sacrifice another bargain, or—

*BUZZ.*

His face lights up at the sound.

"Was that your phone?" Connor asks, eyebrows raised.
Techno nods as he frantically pulls out his phone.

*IN 2 MINUTES TIME, YOU, PLAYERS 14, AND 15, WILL FOLLOW IT.*
*YOU WILL RUN INTO A FOREST.*
*YOU ARE NOT IN DANGER.*

"What does it say?" Connor asks.

"What does *what* say?" Schlatt calls as he walks over. Technoblade opens his mouth to answer, when he sees something run past him in the corner of his eye.

He snaps his head around, but sees nothing.
"What..?" He mumbles from under his breath.

Then he sees it again— a black, silhouetted figure racing past him from the corners of his peripheral vision. He can't make out anything other than the fact that it was most definitely a human.

"D-Did you see that?" He stutters, turning around as his eyes dart back and forth to trail the figure.

Up ahead of him, he sees the hooded figure run into a forest.
Without thinking, he runs after it.

"*What do you mean you see someone?!"* Schlatt yells, running behind Techno. He didn't expect to find himself actually running, but he is.

Connor stumbles as he tries to maintain his balance, running through bushes and past the tall trees that arched over him.

Techno is running in front of the two— his focus set on nowhere else but the path ahead of him. In front, he can see the figure; too far to identify, yet close enough to know it was there— as it was only just in his sight's grasp.

"Can't you see them?!" Techno shouts back, "*It wants us to follow him!"*

The figure turns a corner around a pile of bushes— and so does Technoblade. Connor exclaims as he is hit in the face with a branch.
"I don't see anything!"

Suddenly, all at once — Each of their phones buzz simultaneously. Schlatt slows down to a fast jog, and checks his phone.

"*Shit"*

But Techno doesn't answer it, as his vision is fixated on the swift, running figure ahead of him. He turns left, and then right, and then left again, and he feels his heart pounding.
He feels his heart pound through his chest as he chases him—

*CRASH!*

He crashes into somebody as they emerge from the bushes, but it's not the figure.

He falls to the ground and yells, before looking up to see who the person is.

He blinks.

*AntVenom?*

# ➳ CHAPTER 17: what have I done?

**(play the song :) )**
**chapter 17; what have i done?**
✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧
✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧
***DIARY USER 15 — JSCHLATT***

Out of breath, he finds himself *actually* running, and he doesn't know why. He doesn't usually run— In fact, he *never* runs, which only makes him question his sanity even more.

His phone buzzes as he's jogging through the bushes, and he slows down to check. His eyes grow wide.

*USER **4** HAS BASHED USER **8** TO DEATH.*
*USER 8 HAS REACHED A **DEAD END.***

"Holy fuck," He mumbles under his breath, before talking louder, "Shit."

*Somebody just died. Oh god, oh fuck. Somebody just died again, what the fuck? Why am I surprised?*
He narrows his eyes more at the text and thinks harder.

*Wait, isn't 8 the same guy who killed Techno's friend? Captain Sparklez. He died? Huh, then whose 4? Christ, can't God just do me one fucking favour and tell me their names?*

The stats to User 4 were released. He checks it.

*STRENGTH: 2/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 5/5*
*TEAMWORK: 5/5*

But wait. Something doesn't seem right. Schlatt scrolls down and checks User 8— Sparklez' stats.

*STRENGTH: 5/5*
*INTELLIGENCE: 3/5*
*TEAMWORK: 2/5*

4 was ranked a 2 in strength, and he managed to take down someone with a 5. Is that even possible?

His train of thoughts are interrupted as he hears Techno yelp. He shoves his phone in his pocket and jogs over to Techno, who is now on the ground. In front of Techno stands a...

"*Well who the fuck are you?"* He retorts, immediately regretting saying that as the truculent words sort of had helplessly slipped out his mouth.

Standing in front of Techno is boy around their age — Around 19, maybe — He has black hair and defining, purple eyes that fulgurate in contrast to his dark clothing. Around his neck is a golden necklace with a purple jewel.

His left shoulder and bicep and is wrapped in a damp cloth; and his face is bruised and scratched, and his eyes are bloodshot and glassy.

"I've come in peace," AntVenom declares, panting as he raises his hands; He looks down at Techno, whose face looks to be in a mixture of fear, shock, and resentment.

"I know, I know. It doesn't really look like that right now. I know you probably want to kill me instead," Ant continues, acknowledging his clearly non-passive expression, "But trust me when I say I'm not here to fight. I *don't* want to fight you, Technoblade. Or any of you guys, for that matter."

"What makes you think we'll believe that?" Schlatt narrows his eyes. Judging by the look on Techno and Ant's faces, the two probably left at bad terms.

Jschlatt doesn't even know him, but he can already tell he doesn't like this guy.

"Huh?! Who are you?" Connor calls, out of breath, as he jogs into the area. He seems to have been the last one to catch up— probably tired from all the running he did earlier.

"*AntVenom*.." Techno hisses, ignoring but answering Connor's question at the same time, "You. Killed. *Cooper."*

"This is a killing game, dude," He shoots back, "I'm playing to survive just like the rest of us. I'm not gonna just sit back and let myself be *killed."*

He takes a deep breath before offering his hand out to help up Techno.

"And I know apologising isn't going to fix anything. Like I said, I'm not here to fight. I came here to find you so I could tell you something."

- - -

Techno glances up at AntVenom. He's mad — No, *infuriated.* What Schlatt can't comprehend is why Techno isn't using this chance to kill him.

And to his disgust, Techno hesitates for a moment before reaching out to take his hand.

Like a shock of electric fulgurates through his nerves, Schlatt rushes to Ant and yanks his wrist, stopping Techno from grasping his hand. His eyes are wide in determination as the question runs through his head— What in the world is Techno *thinking?*

"Cut it with your bullshit, *HankVenom,"* He spits through gritted

teeth, though he doesn't really know *why* he calls him that, "You just killed this guy's friend a few days ago and now you expect us to sit here and listen to you? Ha! Just how *stupid* do you think we are?"

He turns and jabs his finger in Ant's chest.

"If *you* think we're going to even *contemplate* the *idea* of trusting you, then I'll gladly let your sorry little ass be the first to have a taste of my gun."

He pulls out a handgun from his other pocket, aiming it at Ant as he cocks the gun.

"And this time, I think you'd want to take the chance to believe *this shit's real."*

Ant blinks, taken aback by this. Schlatt doesn't believe what is coming out of his mouth for a damned *second.* And he's not stupid, either.

CaptainSparklez had died only minutes ago, and just now AntVenom shows up. Both of them were associated with Technoblade' friend's death; in fact, he would assume that the two were allies themselves. Maybe even friends. That would explain his red eyes— He may have been crying minutes earlier because of that.

If Ant is really out here on his knees begging for the same guy he tried to kill a few days ago to trust what he says, then that must only mean that Ant in an *extremely* vulnerable position. So why couldn't Technoblade see that? Seeing through Ant—It was as clear as broad daylight.

"Trust me? I never said you need to trust me," AntVenom says solemnly, "I know damn right that none of you do. I just *need you to hear me out."*

He gives a worried look to Techno, before shooting a hard glare at Schlatt. With cold words, he says:

"*And Schlatt. I wouldn't be telling people who to trust and who not to trust if I were you*."

- - -

Technoblade and Connor are silent, looking at Schlatt to find any sort of hints as to why Ant said this. Instead, Schlatt blinks, and lets out a mocking laugh.

"The fuck? Why would *I* listen to *you,* bitch*?"*

Before AntVenom has the time to answer, he's cut off by Technoblade.

"Schlatt, cut it out," He utters, standing up, "Ant obviously doesn't want to fight. Actually, why *are* you here?"

Ant takes a deep breath. "I've come here to compromise."

Schlatt scoffs. "What have you got to compromise *with*?"

AntVenom ignores this, and he turns to look at Techno.

"I'm willing to put aside our differences and accept you if you help me take this risk. Believe me, I'm still a bit shaky on this too. But I've been thinking about it every night— Ever since that day. And the more I've thought about it, the more I think it's the right thing to do."

Ant takes another deep breath, before exhaling. "I want to form a *truce* with you, Technoblade."

- - -

Techno's expression shifts from neutral to surprised. Schlatt doesn't take a second to interrupt.

"To *hell* with that! We're not going to fucking team with a *lying scumbag,"* He accuses, "And I'm only gonna say this once — I'm *gonna say this once*, *AntVenom.* Never gonna say it again, absolutely *never* gonna say *this* again—"

"You're saying a lot of things at once"

"I'm just gonna say this once: I think you're full of shit."

"Full of shit? *Really?"*

Jschlatt turns to Techno. "You're not going to believe this guy, right?"

But Techno's gaze is fixated on AntVenom; his posture is upright, and the fleeting look in his eyes can only mean one thing.

*Oh, no. No you fucking don't, Techno.*

"Taylor," Techno starts in a hoarse voice, "Why do you want to truce with me?"

"Because I think you're a good person, and you have potential. And I don't want to kill you, not now and not in this point of time. I'm not asking for an alliance, Techno. I'm simply asking if we could spare each others lives until the end. When we get to top four, that's when the truce will be over," He explains solemnly, "From now 'til then, we have each other's backs, yeah? If I happen to be near you and you're in danger, I'll save you. I'm a man of my word, Technoblade."

Techno looks down for a minute or two. He reaches out his hand. "Taylor. I accept your deal."

- - -

"What?!" Connor and Schlatt both exclaim in sync.

*Is this motherfucker out of his mind?!*

"Awesome," AntVenom grins and reaches out to shake his hand. He narrows his eyes as he looks at Schlatt from the corners of his sight.

As Ant releases from the shake, he turns to Schlatt. His eyebrows lower, and the corners of his lips curve downwards. He stares unrelentingly at him, eyes sharp enough to cut through steel.

"You haven't told him, haven't you?"

His words are frantically accusing and demanding. Schlatt coughs. "Told him what?"

"You know *exactly* what I'm talking about."

The first thing he thinks of is the night he almost killed Technoblade. The cold and heavy feeling of holding the metallic pistol in hand, cocked and ready to shoot through his head.

He wants to erase that from his memory. He wishes he never did that— He wishes he never even *thought* about killing him.

*Killing.* It's an inhumane conception of life, and definitely a contradicting belief in *this game*.

To survive, you must *kill.* You can't survive without getting your hands dirty— And while he usually would let that task be up to someone else, it comes to moments like that night when your faced with the chance to get the blood on your hands in order to be *free.*

But he couldn't do it. He couldn't kill — Murder was something he could never bring himself to do. He doesn't want to admit it, but he knows he's selfish; he's selfish and would do anything to get his way. But if there's one thing he *can't* do, it's *murder. He can never kill a living, breathing human.*

It's not right. *And he's too scared.*

He lives full of regrets of what he did in the past. Things he's done and wish he could have taken back. All because of his *greed.*

While Schlatt's original intentions was to get rid of Techno as soon as he gave him what he wanted, he's realised that he can't do it. He *can't kill him.* Not even for freedom. Not even to *live.*

And he's frustrated with that. He's frustrated because of his stupid morals. He's frustrated because he's too scared. He's frustrated because he's selfish. *And he's frustrated because he never makes the right choice.*

He scams because there's nothing else he can do. Because nobody can trust him— God, he can't even trust *himself.*

That's when it hits him. AntVenom is talking about *The Bounty.*

*The Bounty placed on Technoblade.*

- - -

With all that has been happening, he has almost completely forgot about it— much less, forgot about telling *him.* He knows that Techno doesn't know. But he thought maybe he could get away with not needing to let him in on the information. Maybe it was because he didn't originally intend for Techno to last this long; or maybe, he didn't intend on *himself* lasting this long.

"C'mon, tell him," Ant ushers, "After all, you are his *teammate*. Teammates trust each other, right?"

"Tell me what?" Techno queries. He looks over at Schlatt. "Is there

something you need to tell me?"

"Technoblade," AntVenom asks sincerely, "Has Schlatt told you anything about *a bounty?"*

Techno raises an eyebrow. "A.. *What?"*

"I knew it!" Ant exclaims, jumping up as he points at Techno, "The message was sent to everybody *BUT* the bounty! I fucking knew it!"

He feels his heart pound inside his chest, and his mind races. What the hell was he going to do?

*I fucked up again.*

*Oh god, what am I going to do? Why do I always fuck things up? I should have told him sooner. Why didn't I tell him sooner? What do I do?*

***What have I Done?***

He bites his lip, almost on the verge of breaking. He can't let this friendship die — He can't let his connection with Techno tear apart. He can't let it happen.

He sees Connor look down, hanging his head low in guilt.

"I-I don't know what you're.. *talking about,"* Schlatt chokes out.

"Techno," Ant repeats, "A few days ago, there was a bounty set on a player. That player was you."

He holds out his phone and scrolls up to a message sent a few days ago:

*ATTENTION ALL! I HAVE DECIDED TO LAY OUT A TWIST! I HAVE SET A BOUNTY ON A RANDOM PLAYER IN MIRAI SMP!*
*IF YOU KILL THE BOUNTY, YOU MAY BE RELEASED AND FREED FROM THE GAME! HOW COOL IS THAT?*
*HAHA. MAYBE THAT WILL GET YOUR GAME UP 'N RUNNING!*
*ANYWAYS, THE BOUNTY IS:* ***USER 1. THE BLOOD GOD.***

Techno falls quiet as his eyes scan the message, the tension in the air around them increasing as each second passes. His face gradually becomes more pale and dejected.

What was once his crimson eyes glimmering with persistence and boldness just a few minutes ago, was now faded to just a dull, bland shade of maroon red.

His bottom lip quivers ever so gently as he reads the messages.

"Anyways," Ant says, slipping the phone back in his pocket, leaving Techno speechless, "I'm gonna go leave you guys be now. Remember, we got a truce now. Goodluck!"

He runs off.

- - -

"Is.." Techno croaks, dejection almost *screaming* at Schlatt from his throat as he turns to look at him, "Is it true, Schlatt?"

"I.." He stutters, "I.. I don't know. I don't know anymore."

"Wh... *Why didn't you tell me?"*

"I... *don't know.* Techno I-"

"What do *you mean* you don't know?" Techno says, a bit more aggressively this time, "Why did you keep this from me? I thought we were allies, Schlatt. *I trusted you."*

Techno's voice is strained as he pleads. He's hurt.

*I hurt him.*

"I don't- This isn't— This isn't what it looks," He stumbles, "I.. No, please, Technoblade. My man, you got to trust—"

"*Trust you? I did, Schlatt. I did trust you.* And look where that got me! God knows what else you did behind my back."

"N-No, I.."

Technoblade turns around, and Schlatt reaches out for his hand.

*No, Techno. Listen to me. I didn't want this to happen.*

Techno jerks his arm away from him, back still facing towards them.

"You're right, Schlatt," He mutters, "I should have *never* trusted a scammer."

And he walks away, leaving Connor and Schlatt by themselves in this godforsaken forest.

# ➳ CHAPTER 18: intel-5 trio

**chapter 18; intel-5 trio**

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***DIARY USER 13 — JOKO***

As he walks, navigating to find this so called 'Wilbur' who has intentions to team with him, he lets his mind cloud itself with thoughts— Like electrical wires connected in a continuous circuit, questions and ideas cycle around in his head as he tries to deduce what the hell just happened.

*'Kill Technoblade.'*

What did that even *mean?* No, the better question would be— *Why?*

A6D— That french dude— He wasn't even *participating* in the game. How could he possibly know who Technoblade is? Unless Wilbur has some sort of mega grudge against Techno for whatever reason and decided to give a random baker an essay on why Technoblade should be dead, then there would be no way he would know about Techno. Much less, have a strong enough desire for Joko to kill him.

*Unless.. Maybe he knew him before the Game?*

It would make sense. But in that case, wouldn't he have told both him *and* Travis about this? Why would A6D want *Joko* to know about this information? Unless he's aware that Travis was formerly allied with Technoblade..

*The fuck? This makes no sense.*

But there's one thing he knows for sure: He can't kill Technoblade. Not at this point in time, anyway. It would be useless to his game. He knows that Techno is trying to find Travis, hence the 20 missed calls on his phone. It's just a matter of *when.*

"Joko, are we close?" Travis mumbles sheepishly, staying behind Joko as they wander through another damned forest in the supposed direction Wilbur had travelled through.

Joko opens his mouth to speak, when his phone suddenly buzzes. He quickly checks it.

*PLAYERS NUMBER 7 & 8 ARE NEARBY AT A RIVER LOCATED TO YOUR LEFT.*
*THEY SHOW 70% HOSTILITY.*

*SUGGESTED FORM OF PUNISHMENT: BASHING.*

"What does it say?" Travis queries.

Joko looks to Travis with a sharp stare. *"We found them."*

*"*... Uh, found.. Who?"

"8 and 7. The same guys who had killed your friend. And now they'll get a taste of their own medicine."

Travis' eyes grow wide in panic, and he stops walking, tugging back on Joko's sleeve.

"I— I can't do this, J-Joko. I changed my mind— I- I can't.. I can't kill them. I can't do this. P-Please can we leave? Can w-we turn back, please? We d-d-don't n.."

"Travis, it's okay," He assures him, "Remember what I said earlier? *I'll* be the one to kill them. You can stay behind me and watch. I promise I'll protect you, okay?"

*Pussy. Hopefully he'll change his mind at the last second and join me in defeating 8.*

"I know, but.. I just don't want to see anyone d..d—"

Travis' voice trails off as he hears something. He perks his ears up, listening as an odd but pleasing sound is heard.

Joko hears it, too. It's soft and faint, but he can hear it. It's a lilting, mellow and mellifluous sound; filling his insides with pure tranquility, his body feeling light by the vague, harmonious tune of the sounds. Chords and tones, meshed together to create the perfect...

*Melody. It's a melody.*

"Wilbur," Joko whispers, and he jogs carefully towards the direction of the music. An arch of bushes are in his way, and crouching low, he slowly pulls apart the leaves and branches; as he draws back the bushes, a small, but beautiful clear river shining as the sunlight reflects off it is revealed. Sitting on a large rock beside the water's currents is a boy in a yellow turtleneck sweater, with a grey beanie.

He's humming lowly while strumming calmly on a guitar.

That's him alright. The boy with the guitar. *Wilbur.*

"Travis," He whispers, not taking his gaze away from the boy and his guitar, "Stay here."

*If my suspicions are right, Wilbur must think I'm alone. I can't let him know I'm with Travis, or he might not tell me why he's here.*

Travis obeys, and keeps hidden behind the bushes as Joko emerges.

"I knew you would find me," Wilbur hums, not turning around as Joko walks.

"What are you doing?" Joko replies firmly, stopping as he stands beside Wilbur, "Someone could hear you. You're giving away your

position!"

Wilbur stops strumming, and he looks up at Joko with his rich, dark brown eyes.

"Well yeah, how else would you find me?" He smiles as he strums a final chord on his guitar, before swinging the guitar on his back. "And c'mon. You have to admit, it was a pretty good tune."

Admittedly, Wilbur was.. *adequately* skilled at the guitar. And the melody he had played was music to his ears.

"Okay, fine, you're right. It was good," Joko deadpans as Wilbur expresses another smirk, "But this.. This isn't the right place *or* time to play.. *A guitar."*

"Oh?" Wilbur raises an eyebrow at him, "Why's that? I've been hanging around this place for the past week or so, and I've been pretty safe. I haven't seen—"

"7 and 8 are nearby," Joko hisses, interrupting him as he makes sure to keep his voice low. Wilbur pauses, a slight hint of distress on his face as he stands up.

"Wh..?"

"Two players with fairly high stats are nearby, and they don't look to be hiding," He continues, "So whatever you wanted me here for, Wilbur, make it quick. We don't have time to sit here and watch you play your guitar."

Wilbur's lips purse at this, looking to be in deep thought.

"Okay, I'll tell you," He exhales, "I haven't just been playing on a guitar this whole game, Joko. In fact, I've been spending this entire time collecting information on all the player's statistics. As you should know by now, the only way you can find out about a player's information is either if they had killed someone, or if your diary detects them nearby.

This place here has been kind of my 'base', I guess you could say. Each day, I would go out and try tracking down a specific player. Once I found them, I'd run back here and take note of their stats. I've managed to figure out everybody's stats here in the game."

He points at him. "Out of 15 players, there are only 3 of us with rank 5 intelligence. Me, you, and Jschlatt."

Joko nods, intrigued by this new source of information. Wilbur had definitely proven himself to be a sharp player. Maybe there's room for another.. *teammate.*

"So I've been contemplating about this idea for a while now," Wilbur continues, quickly talking, "And I've been thinking the three of us should form an alliance. Y'know, we got the brains 'n all. With our intel combined, we could outsmart the other players and make it to top 3!"

Joko muses, scratching his chin.

It was definitely a tempting offer. If the three could combine their wits, they very well could have a guaranteed spot in the final three. The only problem is that Wilbur doesn't know about Travis..

*I'll consider it.*

Before Joko can say anything, he hears a loud cry. Wilbur and Joko spin around, and they see 7 and 8 run from the bushes, standing at the other side of the river.

"Yo, what's up?" 8 (AKA, CaptainSparklez) calls from the other end. He's holding a gun in right hand, aiming it carelessly at Wilbur, who takes a step back in fear. Joko, however, is the polar opposite.

"Man, you don't know how long I've been waiting to find you," Joko smirks, confidently whipping out a small handgun from a holster attached to his belt.

Joko shoots Wilbur a 'we're-gonna-fight-them' look, before immediately springing into action. Now, typically, he'd be able to kill them both in a mere second. But that wouldn't be all as entertaining than to drag out long fights. After all, he wants to put on his best show for Travis, whose watching from behind.

He shoots poorly at Sparklez as he sprints along the coast of the river. As he runs, small puddles of murky water splash onto his ankles, wetting his shoes. Sparklez runs parallel to him, shooting back in retaliation. Joko dodges the bullet, rolling swiftly on the dirt ground as he shoots at his enemy's legs.

Meanwhile, 7 breaks off from 8's side and parkours across clusters of large rocks to get to the other side of the river where Wilbur stood. Wilbur braces himself, holding his guitar tightly in his hands. As AntVenom crosses the river, he whips out his own pistol and shoots at Wilbur as he yells. Wilbur lifts his guitar, shielding him from the attack as the bullet penetrates and gets stuck inside his guitar.

"Huh, a guitar just saved my life," He utters breathlessly, before taking off into a full sprint, towards Joko's direction.

"That was just luck," AntVenom calls back, "But can your guitar save you from *this?"*

He sprays another round of bullets as he runs after Wilbur. Wilbur ducks, relying on the guitar on his back to hopefully shelter him from the gun's ammo. He feels something wet run down his ankle.

Joko bolts back up from the ground, his hair wet from the water, gracefully dodging Sparklez' bullets. He twists his body, landing another more *accurate* shot at his opponent as he ducks. Sparklez shrieks as a bullet from Joko's gun perpetrates through his lower abdomen. This was on purpose— A 9mm cal bullet cannot kill a

person unless if the shot is anywhere above the lungs; if it were to puncture any vital organs such as the arteries, aorta or the heart, he'd be dog meat.

It's not possible for him to die by blood loss by being shot in the abdomen, but it does fatigue his attacks a lot more.

He grits his teeth in pain, and aims another shot at Joko. To his dismay, Joko's a little short on this, and the bullet hits him perfectly in his waist. He yells in agony, and clutches his waist.

"Sparklez!" AntVenom yells, his attention away from Wilbur as he watches his friend's stomach bleed out. Nows Joko's chance to land an attack. He cocks his pistol, but there's no more ammo left.

He resorts to another plan; with his free hand, he rips off his mask and throws it like a frisbee towards Sparklez. Flying at full force, it hits him right in the eyes, causing him to let out a hearty yell.

"Wilbur!" He shrieks, "*Finish him!"*

"But I don't have a weapon!" Wilbur calls back, running towards Joko.

"Use your *guitar!!"*

Wilbur's face is hesitant, but his gestures say otherwise— With one leap, he jumps onto a log placed in the centre of the shallow river. He runs across, and Joko notices that Wilbur's leg is bleeding.

"Ant!!" Sparklez yells, voice breaking from the pain of the bullet, "*Go! Run!"*

"What? What are you saying?! I can't—"

"We can't fight them! *Just go! GO! Go before they kill y—!"*

Sparklez is hit in the head with Wilbur's guitar, knocking him unconscious. Number 7's shoulders begin to shake, before retreating and turning back where they came from.

Travis is laying still, watching from the bushes. He followed over to where Wilbur, Sparklez and Joko were, whilst still amidst in the bushes; and now, he has a clear view of the three.

Joko was on the floor, on the side closest to Travis, holding his waist tightly. Wilbur was over on the other side with Sparklez.

His eyes grow wide as he sees Wilbur's guitar smash down against his enemy's head, knocking him into oblivion. His guitar breaks a little in the process, and with shaking hands, Wilbur lands another blow at him. Something about this awful act was mesmerising to Travis— and he *couldn't look away.*

And suddenly, he finds himself clenching his fists tightly, watching eagerly and in anticipation. Wilbur lands one more hit on Sparklez, causing his guitar to snap in half while throwing Sparklez into the rocky river.

*Die. Die. Die. Die.*

The words keep repeating in his head. And then, after a long minute, his phone buzzes.

CaptainSparklez was dead.

And he can't help but giggle.

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***DIARY USER 4 — WILBUR***

"I killed him. I killed CaptainSparklez!"

He falls to his knees, hands shaking as he drops his broken guitar. "And I broke my fucking guitar!"

"Your first kill of the game!" Joko exclaims to him at the other side of the river, running through the shallow water to get to Wilbur. His hood is over his head, and he quickly grabs up his mask from the floor where he threw it at, and adjusts it back on before Wilbur could see his face.

"So," Wilbur pants, still overwhelmed by the kill, "You — Still want to.. —Team?"

"Well," He replies, "You've demonstrated a lot of potential. So I'm willing to ally with you— On *two* conditions."

Wilbur nods, almost exploding with joy and relief. He's been planning this alliance for so long now, and he didn't actually think it would *work out.*

"One," He begins, "You let *my* friend, Travis, join the alliance. And two.. *You'll help me kill Technoblade."*

While the idea of somebody not in the same rankings as him joining the alliance did disappoint him a little, nonetheless he's grateful that Joko was even considering the option. Anything was okay with him at this point.

"Sure," Wilbur says, standing up, "But first.. I need to go buy myself a new guitar. My diary can't tell me anything unless I have an instrument on me."

"Fair enough. How about we meet up somewhere at a camping ground at the other side of town? We can exchange numbers now that we've met."

"Sounds good," He nods, and the two exchange numbers. Once they finish, he waves at Joko as he makes his way back to the other side of the river; and Wilbur himself turns around to make his way to the nearest markets.

The two boys part ways, and Wilbur runs through the forest, navigating a pathway that will hopefully lead him out of here soon. Without knowing any future information from his phone, he could be heading to a dead end without even *realising it.*

You see, Wilbur's future is told in the form of lyrics. But without an instrument, the diary refuses to give him any information, hence

why he always has a guitar. Slightly inconvenient, but hey— at least he can keep himself occupied in this sick, sick game.

As he runs, he stops as he hears a voice from a few meters ahead of him; while trees were blocking his view, he could hear people:

"N-No, I.." stutters a hoarse, shaky voice.

"You're right, Schlatt," another voice mutters, "I should have *never* trusted a scammer."

Immediately, his eyes light up. Schlatt! It was Schlatt! And perfect timing, too!

*This is perfect! I met both Joko and Jschlatt without having to do any serious tracking!*

Without thinking, Wilbur breaks through the bushes.

"Hello my pretty princess—!" He declares, but stops mid way as he sees Jschlatt and another random boy standing there in front of him, looking at him like he was some kind of madman.

# ➳ CHAPTER 19: carson king

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***TECHNOBLADE***

*"I should have known."*

The words are no more than a bitter mutter from under his breath; he spits on the ground, kicking the pebble that's been rolling in front of him for the past several minutes. It's pathetic, but least his focus on dribbling the small rock along the grass like a soccer ball slightly takes his mind off of the whole situation.

But even so, he can't help but let his sour thoughts trail back to *them.* Trekking along aimlessly through the dirt pathways dividing the bushes and trees, he smacks himself in the head. "I should've have *known* not to trust them. God, why did I trust *him?* How could I have even let myself think they were actually *good* people?"

He feels his head — but more importantly, his heart — ache. Like his heart had just been torn out of his chest. It's a different feeling, to how he felt when he watched Cooper die. His heart broke, but in a different way.

No, his heart hasn't been ripped out. It's been stabbed.

*How the hell could I have been so gullible?*

A wave of churning emotions floods his insides out; on one hand, he's furious. The kind of furious that makes his sweat-greased balled-up hands shake with adrenaline, and ignite a fire welling up in his ribcage. He's not only mad with them, but with *himself*. He should know that in the end, taking them up on their fraud of a deal was at his own risk. Really, he should be blaming himself, for being such a naive fool.

He screws his eyes shut, bringing his hand to clench his lips to stop himself from crying out. The other part of him is miserable. Burdened by a feeling of desolation and guilt. He hates them, and he hates them even more knowing they betrayed him. But he can't bring himself to truly . . . *hate.* To say he hates someone is one thing, but to feel it deep down — to feel that hatred, rooted in your blood and veins — it's something else.

He knows for a fact, that he is not capable of feeling true hatred towards them.

His eyes shut tighter, and he feels his throat choke up. He puts his

head in his hands, helpless to the cry that tears from his throat.

*Connor. You were my friend. I might have saved you, but in return you gave me the company I didn't even know I needed. You weren't afraid of me.*

He stops walking, his legs shaking — it feels as if any moment, he'll collapse to the ground. He cries from his throat grow louder, like a shriek piercing through the skies.

*And Schlatt . . . I thought . . . I thought I could trust you. I thought we were a team.*

What was all of what they went through for in the end? Was it all an act, just to backstab him whenever they felt like the time was right? He can't bear to bring himself to even believe that.

No, Cooper and Travis would have *never* done that. They would never betray him, or keep things from him, or stab him in the back. He didn't even know them for long but it felt as if he knew them his whole *life* — like somehow, maybe in a different reality, they were close like brothers.

It only makes him feel more stupid — how could he have possibly thought that Schlatt and Connor could replace them? Nobody could replace them. *Nobody.*

He feels his face — it's damp with tears. His eyes sting as he opens them, as the cold hair hits his face. What is he doing? Standing here crying won't do anything.

He darts off, racing without direction through the clusters of trees and bushes. He gives up on hiding his face, letting tears roll down his cheeks as he uses the adrenaline he had to sprint with full force.

*There I go again, losing my friends. Is this why I'm ranked 1 in Teamwork? Tell me God, is it? Is it because I'm too weak to protect them? Or is it because I'm too weak to* ***protect myself?***

He doesn't care anymore, if crying like a baby makes him look weak. Isn't crying being human? Feeling the things he's feeling . . . doesn't it make him humane? More humane than Schlatt, or Connor? More humane than Sneeg? Than Sparklez? Than Taylor?

His legs are numb from running for so long; for how much time has passed, he doesn't know. But a small sense of relief washes over him as he sees an exit to the forest nearing his way in the distance. He pushes himself more, sprinting for the exit.

When the light of day finally reaches him and he's no longer shrouded by trees, he quickly scuffs to a stop as he meets the ledge of a cliff. Below the cliff he's standing on top of, is the sight of the ocean horizon. Daylight gleams on the surface of the crystal clear waters, making it sparkle and glimmer even more. Laid out near the shore and cliff ledge, are groups of large rocks and boulders. Further out to the right, is a beach shore almost completely coated

with seaweed and shells.

The soft breeze in the heavy atmosphere hits his face, in a sense almost rejuvenating his senses. He feels the tears on his cheeks already dry up, and he takes a deep breath to try calm himself down. His hair blows back gently, dancing in the soft breeze of noon. He looks down at his hands and arms — it's plastered with scratches and bruises, most likely from the thorn bushes he accidentally ran into while he was running. He only just realises now how dirty his white polo shirt is.

As he gazes out on the ocean, something distinctly foreign to the waters catches his eye. Over there, a small raft with a man sitting on top rocks upon the sea. He narrows his eyes, trying to make out who the person is.

His phone buzzes.

*PLAYER NUMBER 2*
*AKA, CARSON KING*
*LOCATION: 45M AWAY IN FRONT OF YOU. PADDLING ON A WOODEN RAFT IN THE OCEAN.HE WILL LOOK AT YOU. HE WILL TRY TO TURN AWAY. LET HIM KNOW YOU AREN'T HUNTING. HE WILL SAVE YOU.*
*0% HOSTILITY.*
*90% CHANCE THEY ARE ALONE*

He feels his head suddenly snap back into the mindset of his current situation. No more crybaby Techno. Now, it's game-on Techno.

*So he's also a player,* he mulls over, watching the man fail poorly at steering his raft, *'Carson King' . . . I don't think I've seen him around yet.*

Another sudden thought strikes him. *Wait a minute . . . he will save me? The hell does that mean?*

Carson looks to have noticed Techno's presence there, and... wait, is he trying to paddle *away?*

Techno thinks for a moment. Would talking to him be a safe choice? Or is he even more stupid for even *thinking* that? Especially after what had happened with Schlatt and Connor, how could he bring himself to trust someone again so soon?

But his diary is telling him otherwise — Number 2 shows no sign of hostility, and from the looks of his hand-crafted float, he's probably alone. Though it's not like Techno is in much of a place to say that. After all, they are in the same boat. Or, *raft*, could he say.

He closes his eyes and takes another deep breath, before cautiously stepping over the ledge of the cliff. He's going to approach him. Clearly, if he's trying to escape, that only proves he really doesn't want to fight. And what's he gonna do? Also walk

away? He can't expect to get anywhere or make any progress in this game if he *doesn't take a risk*.

The cliff has a steep, rocky, slope; and as he dangles his legs over the ledge of the cliff, he twists around and grabs onto the clifftop, hanging down from the edge. He lets go, sliding as he tries to hold a steady grip on the cliff's hard surface. To his dismay, it doesn't work out as he intended, and he ends up struggling and sliding down; sending tears through his shirt and pants, and cuts on his arms and legs.

He turns around to face Carson on the raft, and at this point he's already completely turned the whole raft around. It's just like what his diary said — he's trying to turn away.

"W—Wait!" Techno calls out, waving his hand as he stumbles down onto the rocks, "Carson, I'm not here to hurt you!"

Carson turns to look at him through his glasses, his blonde hair and tri-coloured jacket blowing wildly in the now suddenly violent wind. The clouds start to clump together and darken several shades, and the waves of the crystal-clear ocean begin to become more powerful, jerking his small raft up and down.

"How do you know my name?!" he yells out through heaving pants, hands shaking as he clutches onto his small hand-built paddle.

He probably should have called him Number 2, now that he thinks about it. "My diary said so!"

"How do I know you're not—!"

Carson stops, and he drops the paddle as he pulls something out from his pocket, which was presumably his phone. He checks it, and glances at Techno, mouth wide open.

"You do realise you are the guy everyone's trying to kill, right?" Carson calls back, his voice deadpan.

"Yep. I'm in a bigger risk..."

His voice trails off, and his vision starts to blur. Oh shit.

*Is this where the saving me part comes in?*

His energy draws out from within him, now no longer strong enough to even stand. He collapses right into the water before seeing only black.

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"Yo, what's up! Hey, hello! Greetings, welcome back!!!"

Techno growls as the first thing he wakes up to is God over-enthusiastically clapping his hands. God returns his unamused frown with a playful smirk.

"Looks like someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed, huh? ~ Haha!"

"Just shut up." He hisses through grit teeth, crawling up to his knees. "Do you know what the hell I've been through—?"

"Yes." God replies, intervening his sentence. "I see all. Grow up, Techno. You're even more of a crybaby than that Travis guy!"

Hearing him say that only infuriates him even more. "How dare you bring Travis into this!! You know, my life has been pretty shit since you started your stupid game. The *least* you can do is at least **try** to pity and feel sympathy for...."

He stops throwing his tantrum, as he realises God and himself aren't the only ones here in the room.

Around him lay 4 other boys, all giving God the same disinterested glare — all except one. A navy-haired boy with a blue hood and eyepatch. He lay cross-legged with an empty expression along his face. He looks familiar.

*Wait.*

He's the same boy who he had seen kill 5, SneegSnag, the other day. **Number 9.**

*Ryan, I think was his name.*

The only other boy he can immediately recognise is Taylor.

The other two were yet to be revealed to him — but one had a yellow turtleneck, while the other wore a grey hood. Grey hood guy is wearing a green, goblin-like mask, who he can swear is glaring right at him. An uneasy feeling sets in his stomach as he glances at him — like something about that guy isn't right.

"Now, as you guys can see," God begins, putting his hands together. "I have only brought here the 5 of you! I did that on purpose, and a few of you may have seen each other prior to this meeting. But in case you don't know, I'll introduce everybody for you. Starting clockwise, we have Number 1: Technoblade. Number 7: AntVenom. Number 4: Wilbur Soot. Number 9: Krinios, AKA Ryan. Number 13: Joko."

He feels his heart stop as he hears his name. *Number 13.*

*The man who was with Travis.* The uneasiness starts to slowly turn into vexation.

God, walking in circles as he grin, continues his little smartass speech. "So why did I bring you here, you may be wondering? Well it's simple. Because now marks the time in the game for you to be aware of your **abilities**!"

He stops and raises his hand, opening his palm as a shadowy aura in the form of a flame hovers above his hand. He closes his fist, and turns to look at the 5.

"As you should have picked up by now, you 5 are the first 5 players in Mirai SMP to score a kill. Yeet, yeah boy! That's what you humans say, right? Sorry, I haven't really been keeping up with

human terminology."

"A few years late," Ryan says bluntly. "We say things like 'pogchamp' now, or 'ez dubs'."

"What about booyah, oh snap!"

"That's the 90s."

"Okay, whatever. You're wasting my time!" God pouts, "The point is—!"

"How about *I* do the explaining instead?"

God turns around, and a silhouetted figure walks from behind him. He has horns and large dragon-formed wings, and it's eyes illuminated a vibrant, captivating red. God slumps, and hovers to sit down at a randomly floating bench. "Okay, whatever."

The figure clears its throat. "Hi. I'm God's assistant. Just call me Yetz. You're all here because—"

"Yeah, yeah, I told them that already, just get to the point."

Yetz groans. "Right. I'm sure you've all been probably told at the start of the game. Once you kill someone, you'll unlock a special ability only you can use *once*. This power can be used to dodge **a Dead end,** and possibly change the fate of the entire game."

God nods. "A dead end doesn't necessarily mean you're doomed to die! It just means that unless you can change your future, you're going to meet a dead end!"

"How exactly do we *use* this power?" Taylor inquires.

"A catchphrase," both God and Yetz respond in sync.

God grins, leaning against the armrest. "Everyone has a catchphrase! And by saying this catchphrase out-loud, you'll trigger the power. Can only be used once though, so be careful not to say it unless you really need to!"

"Your catchphrase will be sent through to you via your phones," Yetz announces, "I don't recommend you telling anyone."

"Why's that?" Green-mask guy asks, "What happens if someone finds out?"

"Then they can *take your ability."*

Green-mask guy goes silent, before nodding. Ryan speaks up. "What if you accidentally say your catchphrase?"

God chuckles at this. "Then that's just too bad!"

Yetz looks around. "Any more questions?"

The room is silent. He turns to God, and God nods.

"Well that concludes our quick meeting. You're all lucky, really. This will be the only time I'll ever do something like this. From now on, anyone else who gets a kill will just be alerted of this on their phones. Okay bye!"

He snaps his fingers, and Technoblade falls into oblivion once again.

Except seconds before his unconsciousness, he hears God whisper to him in his head:

"*Be careful, Joko's on your tail.*"

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"*GAH!!*"

His eyes snap open, and he feels a rush of water run up his throat. He jerks up and coughs heavily, spraying out what felt like litres of water out his lungs. His phone buzzes, presumably the catchphrase.

"Dude? Are you okay?!"

He turns around and sees Carson sitting beside him. He looks like he had just swam across the Atlantic ocean.

"W-W-What.." he stutters, looking down at himself. He's completely soaked, covered in water and sand.

"You just, like... blacked-out all of a sudden," Carson blinks, "And fell head first into a rock in the water. I don't know, I thought maybe you did some drugs earlier and passed out, 'cus your eyes were red as fuck." His expression is grave, yet concerned for his health, as he looks at him sincerely.

"Until I jumped into the water to save you..." he goes on. "I thought you seriously had a concussion or something. I mean, I'm glad you didn't. I wasn't looking forward to doing mouth-to-mouth with you, no offense. You seem cool but kissing guys isn't really my thing, yeah?"

As he goes on nervously rambling, Techno finds himself sitting in his own world of swirling thoughts. For starters, how the hell did his phone not get water damage from that? Does he have a water proof case? Oh, come to think of it, he probably does.

He puts a weak hand to his forehead, and feels something liquid run through his fingers. As he lowers his hand, he sees that it's covered in blood.

"Damn it, God," he mutters to himself, before turning to look back Carson. "Why did you save me?"

"Well... I can't leave a man to just— well, bleed out and drown in the water." He seems almost embarrassed by saying that, as if he's some kind of coward for not using that opportunity to kill him and get the bounty. "I mean, that's just fucking wrong. I was originally gonna just leave you here on the shore... but then you woke up. So, uh. Don't kill me. Please."

Techno's gaze averts to the sand below him.

For a game meant for the sole purpose killing and hunting people, he's surprised that he hasn't been seeing much of it. In fact, he's come across more people who had *saved* him than try to kill him.

In a way, it almost seemed *surreal* how *humane* people were. God, this is a game of quite literal *life or death.* You either die, or become

an immortal being. So why aren't people corrupted with greed for this?

Especially after hearing the news about how a bounty was set on *him*— A one-way ticket to lead someone out of here, at the cost of nothing but getting their hands dirty. Being unconscious — It was the perfect opportunity for Carson to take him out and be set free. So *why hasn't he taken that shot?*

"Carson.." He mumbles. "Are you alone?"

Carson waits for a minute, and he hangs his head low. "I guess I am now. I never used to be, though."

Techno swears he can see his eyes water.

"That.. *damned.. Joko,"* he fumes with a breaking voice, "If it weren't for him, then *he'd* still be here now with me. *But no, he fucking killed Ted, and I'm gonna make him pay for what he did."*

"Joko.." Techno's awes, coming to the daunting realisation. "He's the same guy who's holding my friend captive."

Caron's eyes grow wide at this. "Really? So he's a kidnapper too. Fuck that. That piece of shit Joko fucked both of us over. What did he do to your friend?"

Techno breathes out slowly in an attempt to hide the shakiness in his voice. "Travis, was his name. Something happened and we were both split apart. Turns out, this whole time, Joko's had him. He hasn't answered any of my calls, so that probably means he doesn't have access to his phone. I've been spending this entire time trying to find him."

Carson snarls from under his breath. "That's pretty fucked. I'd do anything to give that ass-face a piece of my fucking mind, you know?"

"So would I," Techno nods in response, feeling slightly relieved that he is able to share his feelings with someone who is in a similar situation as him. "I don't trust that guy one bit. In fact, who can you even trust anymore in this god forsaken game?"

Carson scoffs at this. "Yeah, to *hell* with me trusting anybody here. Anyone can turn on you in any second — you could kill me right now and I wouldn't see it coming. But, if there's one person I'd be able to put all my faith in, it's got to be Ryan."

*Ryan? Why Ryan?*

"The eyepatch guy? Do you know him?"

"Yeah, Eyepatch guy. And I do know him." Carson takes a seat on the sand, readjusting his position so he's slightly behind Techno (probably for precaution). There's a delay of silence, before he finally finds the words to speak.

"It all started a few weeks ago, before this whole game happened. A really close friend of mine, Eugene Gagliardi, had passed away. I

used to help him out in his restaurant, back when I had a life before this game. When I came into work that day and saw him collapse of a heart attack to the ground, I freaked out. I called the ambulance and insisted on going but they told me to stay. So instead I... I.. Look, I didn't know what to do. I— I just sat outside on a bench that night in an abandoned park and just cried my fucking eyes out. Until a guy walked up to me and reassured me things were gonna be okay. That guy was Ryan. I owe him everything, for helping me out in a situation like that. I was caught way off guard when I found out he was in this game too. I knew I had to find him... But..."

Techno leans in. "But.. *what?"*

"Well, for starters. I don't even know where he is. And how could I help him now, after all this time? I wish I was there for him when he needed help, but I don't know. I don't *know* who he really is. He's always had that dull look in his eyes. So secretive of his life."

Come to think of it, he had noticed that Ryan had an empty expression in his eye, for the other one was covered with an eyepatch. He hasn't seen much of Ryan, but if he had to take a guess from what he's seen so far, then Ryan definitely doesn't seem like the most hyperactive person in this game. He looks up, and only realises that nightfall is dawning.

"Dark already?" He mumbles, "Sheesh, so much has happened today.."

"Yeah," Carson sighs, getting up, "Sorry for wasting your time, dude. I'm glad I ended up saving you though. I... should probably go now, since you need to find your friend and all. Goodluck—"

Techno grabs his wrist, stopping him from walking away. "Wait, Carson!"

Carson looks back at him, and raises an eyebrow. Techno takes a deep breath.

"You... you should come with me."

*Crap, what am I thinking!?*

"Come with you? Why?"

*No, don't do it. You told yourself you can't trust anyone! Don't make the same mistake again!*

"Because..." He swallows, unable to believe what he's about to say. "I want you to help me kill Joko." *Dammit Techno!*

Carson blinks. "But..."

"If the two of us team together, we can kill him." Saying that word — *kill* — makes his stomach churn. He hates that word, with a true passion. But of course, that being said, he's only half-telling the truth. Killing Joko isn't the main goal — it's getting Travis back.

If he can find Joko before he can find him, then he can not only avenge Carson, but he can also save Travis from whatever scheme

Joko's planning.

"Seriously? I mean. You'll actually help me take him down?" Carson gapes. Techno shrugs, before pulling a smug smirk.

"Like you said man, he screwed us both over. I think it's time we screw him over for a change."

# ➳ CHAPTER 20: knock fucking knock, joko

***When you see the ///, play the music.***

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***TECHNOBLADE***

Carson and Techno had spent the night resting — Well, at least, that's what they were meant to do. Techno hadn't been able to get some good sleep at all, and so instead he had stayed up all night, surviving on the last of the left over snacks and energy drinks from his bag.

It had surprised him how quickly Carson had trusted him, considering he couldn't even keep his eyes closed for more than a minute before his anxiety would hit him like a truck; or, perhaps, Carson hadn't slept either, and Technoblade just didn't take notice.

They spent the night camping out near the woods nearby the rocks, and they both agreed to take opposite sides so they wouldn't pull anything on each other. Not that it would have helped, anyway.

When Carson woke up, he found Techno already awake, carving random shapes into the bark of a tree with a small dagger. He noticed Techno's shirt was relatively clean — most likely because he had worn his spare T-Shirt.

"Hey Technoblade," He had greeted him, to which Techno had responded with a bland "Mornin'."

"Wait, holy shit dude. Did you always have that?"

"Have what? My skill for carving?"

"No, the knife. I could carve better."

"Oh, uh. Yeah. Don't you have a weapon?"

Carson had shaken his head at this, hence leading up to this very moment; Techno and Carson deciding to walk into town to purchase a weapon — And some more supplies, too. Since Techno had run out of sandwiches and chips. Also because Carson insisted on getting safety gear like fire-blankets and ropes.

As Techno walks beside Carson, he feels the warm yet comforting sunlight his the side of his face.

The sun was radiating from behind the upright buildings of town; soft, translucent clouds stood out well from being immersed in the cyan blue skies; the city was *alive.* And for what probably felt like the first time in the game— He felt *free.*

*But.. This feeling isn't right.*

However something about this moment didn't sit right in his stomach. And then he remembers; He remembers he had walked down the other end of town with somebody else.

*Schlatt and Connor.*

Is it right? To feel like this with somebody he just met? Is it right to move on?

*No. I can't move on. But.. Why do I miss them? They betrayed me. So why; why do I miss them?*

He looks away from Carson, wiping his eyes.

"You okay?"

Techno snaps his eyes open and jerks around, only to find Carson looking at him genuinely. His hazel eyes are glimmering in the sunlight; a shine to his eyes that made him see the true and kind man he really is.

"Oh, yeah. I'm fine."

Carson chuckles. "I still can't believe you didn't actually bring your *wallet*. C'mon, wouldn't that be the first thing you'd think of taking?"

He scoffs. "Yeah, not funny. And I still can't believe that you do stand-up comedy for a living."

They reach a 'Supply store', and Carson spontaneously ushers him to follow inside.

"How'd you remember that? Wasn't that only mentioned at the very start of this game?" He asks, as Techno shrugs and follows him inside.

"You have a pretty memorable face. I always remembered you as the Funny Man."

He folds his arms as he smirks at him. "And you have yet to live up to your nickname."

"Okay, fine, I'll tell you a joke," He offers, and he clears his throat, "Knock knock."

"Who's there?"

"Wood fired."

"Wood fired who?"

"Wood fired pizza? How's pizza gonna get a job now?!"

"... Oh my god."

He facepalms, and he laughs a little. "Okay, gotta admit. That one was pretty good. But so terrible"

"Yes. Because I'm funny," Carson deadpans, before shooting him a friendly grin and bursting into laughter. Then, as if Carson had only just remembered they're walking around aimlessly in a survival-gear store, he exclaims to Techno before running into an aisle. Techno follows him, and they find themselves walking in an aisle filled with

packets of pocket knives, backpacks, canteen bottles, ropes, rifles and much more gear.

Carson grabs a small handgun, and Techno reaches for a cool looking grappling hook.

"You think getting this would be a scam?" He asks Carson, waving to him the grappling gun as he stops looking through the ammo packs.

"Probably," Carson shrugs, "I don't know dude. But it looks cool."

".. Yeah, okay. I'm gonna get this."

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After scavenging the supplies store for an hour so, they had bought their supplies; which had cost them around $5000 in total. It surprised him how much Carson had, much less how willing he was to spend it. But then again, it wasn't like he'd ever be human again after this game ends. It's either be dead, or be God.

Techno had gotten no notifications *or* buzzes on his phone, which he could only presume that he was safe. At least, for now.

"Carson," He asks him, taking a bite into a sandwich they bought from Subway, "How does your phone tell you the future?"

Carson stops drinking his milkshake, and puts it down on the small tabletop. "Well, it tells me anything affecting my wellbeing and safety in the form of a riddle or joke. Here, I'll show you."

He pulls out his phone and scrolls up to a message from a couple of days ago:

*WHY WILL THE CHICKEN CROSS THE RIVER?*
*SO HE CAN GET TO THE OTHER SIDE!*

Techno narrows his eyes, reading the message carefully as he realises.

*So that's why he was on a raft.*

"Whenever my diary says something like this, I kinda pick up that it's supposed to urge me to do it. Otherwise, I may get a dead end again."

"Dead end? *Again?"* Techno queries. Carson nods.

"Back when.. Well, Joko tried to kill us. I had gotten a dead end message on my phone, but somehow I managed to get away with it. God, I really thought I was about to die. I get goosebumps by just looking back over that time."

"So a 'DEAD END' doesn't necessarily mean you're fated to die?" Techno muses.

"I guess so."

*How.. Interesting. This must be a pretty rare thing because I've never seen someone dodge a death before.*

There's a small silence between them, before Carson speaks up again.

"I'm glad I met you, Techno. Because now, I think I have a *real* shot at avenging Ted. I have to be honest, I never thought I could do it on my own. I'm weak, only a *2* in strength. But with you.. I think we really have a chance now.."

"Yeah," He looks down, ".. *A chance."*

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6:00PM.

The sky was darker, and the streets were emptier. Evening was about to sweep over the horizon, and yet Carson and Techno were *still* out, walking along on what was now the streets of an urban city plastered with lights.

Techno's phone buzzes, and Carson looks over at him with an on-edge expression.

*///*

He feels his heart pound fast in his chest.

*PLAYER USERS 12 AND 13 ARE NEARBY, 200M AWAY.*
*THEY ARE ACCOMPANIED WITH 3 OTHER PLAYERS. NUMBER 4, 14, AND 15. THEY ARE AWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE. THEY ARE WAITING.*
*LOCATION: UNDER THE ARCH BRIDGE AT AN ISOLATED AREA OF THE CITY.*
*CHANCES OF SURVIVAL: LIMITED*
*HOSTILITY: 100%*

"What does it say?" Carson asks quickly, his body stiffening as he leans close to Techno. Techno shows him his phone, and Carson's eyes grow wide before narrowing slyly.

*"Joko's here."*

He's already equipped with his gear— On his waist, he has a side holster with his pistol, and a backpack slung over his shoulder. His hood from his jacket is over his head, and he's wearing survival boots.

Techno himself had also gotten himself equipped too; His grappling hook and gun were attached to both sides of his belt inside a holster, and he's also wearing a backpack. He had also bought a cheap dark red hood. It was funny, since it sort of looked like some royal robe.

*Might as well have bought a crown while I was at it. I'm the Blood God, right?*

Speaking of Blood God, that was his motto; 'Blood for the Blood God'.

He wasn't necessarily sure why, since he had never heard himself say this before. But it is what it is, and he hopes that he won't be obliged to use that tonight.

He snaps out of it, back to reality.

"Dude, we can't fight them," He says immediately, putting his phone away.

"Why the fuck not?"

"There's *five* of them, and two of us. We can't take down Joko."

Carson's mouth curves downwards, and he furrows his eyebrows. He throws his hands up, stepping back.

"Where's the attitude we had a few hours ago, man? We made a deal, you said you'd help me kill him. We got him in our sights now, and we have to use that to our advantage before he slips out! This may be our *only chance!"*

*"Carson!"* He yells, "Haven't you just read my message? Our chances of surviving this are practically nothing!"

"I don't *care!"* He snaps back, "*We have him in our grasp!* We have to kill him, *I don't care if that means I'll die!"*

*How could you say that? Throw away your life for revenge. How could you bring yourself to do it?*

"You've been playing it safe this whole time! What would be the point in all of that if we engage in this fight?!"

"Because I'm *not a fucking pussy, Technoblade."*

And before he can say anything, Carson turns around and runs to the bridge.

He hears another buzz on his phone.

He slowly reads it out.

***DEAD END.***

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"Carson! Stop! *Stop running!"*

The words tear like fire through his throat as he chases him through the dimly lit streets of the urban city.

*DEAD END. DEAD END. DEAD END. I'M AT A DEAD END. I'M AT A DEAD END. I'M GOING TO DIE.*

This can't be it. This can't be how he ends. Because of some fight he's dragged into; inevitably in the odds of his favour.

"We're going to kill him!" Carson shrieks, his hood falling down from his face as his hair blows violently in the wind.

"I'm at a *dead end!* We can't—*"*

"Remember what I told you?!" He shrieks back, "You can dodge a dead end!"

"No, I can't!" He cries, "Not this one! We have to turn back! Carson, listen to me!"

Carson stops.

"Last time this happened, I ended up getting my friend killed!" His voice breaks, sniffling back a choke, "I don't want the same thing to happen again. God, please *Carson listen to me, we have to turn around! We.."*

His voice trails off, and he slows down as he sees Carson stop running. His back is facing toward him.
That's when he realises that they are behind a large, concrete pillar. A pillar connected to holding up a bridge.

*We're here.*

- - -

He races to his back against the pillar, shielding himself from the view of anybody lurking past the bridge.

The pillar is about 10 meters wide, at least. He must have been too caught up in trying to chase Carson to realise that they were already under the large arch bridge.

"Carson," He pants heavily, voice quiet with his back up against the wall, "*We have. To go."*

Carson's against the wall too, and slowly, he pulls out a pistol from his holster. He cocks the gun.

"They're at least 30 meters behind us," He whispers, "All we have to do is just aim at his head. I know who he is because of that stupid fucking mask he wears. All we have to do is shoot him. We just have to shoot him and run. That's all we have to do."

He turns to look at Techno with heavy, yet resolute, brown eyes.

Behind his eyes is what he can only see is a rage of pure fury; *sheer fire,* blazing from beneath his hazel iris; A loathing sensation glaring right at him, *screaming the words of revenge.*
The shine he once saw in his eyes isn't there.

Carson isn't the funny, kind-hearted guy he once knew anymore.

Carson is a monster. A monster whose thirsty for the taste of blood, his desire unceasing until he gets what he wants.
He grins, holding his gun up close to his chest as he whispers to himself.
"*Knock, fucking knock, Joko."*

Before Technoblade can say anything, Carson yells as he runs out from his hiding spot, shooting like a madman as he reveals himself to their enemies.

# ➳ CHAPTER 21: YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED!

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***TECHNOBLADE***

He covers his mouth to stop himself from screaming out. He can't follow him. *He can't do it.*

*I can't kill them.*

Hands shaking wildly as he covers them over his mouth, he slides down against the wall in a squat-like position. He feels the corners of his eyes begin to tear up; his voice muffled as he tries to listen. Carson yells something, followed by gunshots and more yells and cries from other voices.

His eyes frantically dart back and forth, and he finds a small crevice in the pillar. He turns around and peeks through the hole, watching.

There are 4 other boys standing there — Joko was one of them, emerged in a grey hoodie cloaked with dried blood at around the waist.

He's holding a gun in his hand, aiming it at Carson as he talks. Wilbur, from who he had recognised back at the Encounter, was also there; He had a guitar slung over his shoulder, and was leaning against a pillar with folded arms.

His heart rate quickens as he sees a boy's face.

*It's Travis.*

Behind Joko stands a feeble looking boy, who is unmistakably his former ally. It had been a week since he had seen him, but that week felt like *years.*

But something about Travis had felt off to him. The Travis he knew would be terrified out of his damned mind.

But Travis looks to be calm; His posture is tall and upright, and his face is stern with an unusual level of intimacy. He doesn't look scared, nor crazed. But rather, he looks calm, and collected.

He doesn't know what Joko could have done to Travis during this time, but it was enough to make him act like a real man fighting for survival.

And he's proud of him.

His focus averts to Carson, who is yelling and thrashing as somebody from behind him chokes him with an arm around his neck, stopping him from shooting.

That person is Schlatt— Whose aggressively fighting back against Carson's forces.

He wants to rush in and save them. He wants to help Carson.

But even after yelling at him that this was all a terrible decision, Carson hadn't listened. Instead, he was too caught up in his conflicting moral of vengeance.

*But is it right? Wanting to avenge your friend, is it the right thing to do?*

This game; This game had constantly played with the meaning of Life or Death with his very mind. Kill or be killed.

What was even the right thing to do anymore? *What is even humane, anymore?*

And that's what he hates most about it all — *What is there left to believe in if the very thing you had believed in had turned against you?*

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He perks his ears up in an attempt to listen to their conversation.

"—Let me go! You fucking bitchface!" Carson shrieks, elbowing Schlatt in the crotch. Schlatt yells a hoarse "Fuck!" before falling to his knees, releasing Carson from his grip. Carson gets his gun in his grip again, before firing poorly at Joko. The bullet completely misses, and that's when Wilbur springs into action.

He tackles him and pins him on the floor.

"Listen to him and lower your gun," He hisses at him, saliva seething from between his teeth, "Or else we're going to kill you."

"Like I'd ever listen to that son of a bitch!" He shouts, "What does it matter anyway? You're gonna kill me either way!"

He yells as he kicks his legs, and Schlatt runs from behind him, holding down his arms as Wilbur pins down his legs.

"Don't make this harder than it needs to be," He grunts at him. Joko walks over to the three, with Travis behind his tail. His weapon is ready to strike.

"Where's Technoblade?" He orders.

"He was with me just a minute ago," Carson retorts, "Why do you want to know? You wanna kill him too, you bastard?"

"Kill him!?" Travis suddenly exclaims, turning to Joko with pleading eyes, "W-We're not gonna kill him, right? He's gonna be with us, right Joko?"

"Of course, Travis," He smiles warmly at him, hand on his shoulder, "We're not *ever* going to hurt him."

*"So why do you want to know?"* He repeats. He feels somebody's shoe press down against his arms; straining, he looks up only to see it's Schlatt.

"Hey kid," He spits, "Like I said, you're making this harder than it needs to be. Answer the fucking question."

"Like I'd tell you," Carson shoots back.

"How about this?" Joko offers, "We'll let you go if you tell us where he is. Else, I—"

*"I'm right here."*

Joko looks up, and he sees Technoblade step out from hiding. He stands in the middle of the bridge's arch, holding nothing in his hands as he faces 30 meters parallel to Joko.

*"Let him go."*

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His hood is covering most of his face, although his red, gleaming eyes stood out from the darkness he was emerged in.

"Technoblade!" Travis exclaims, before quickly covering his mouth. Schlatt turns to look at him, before swiftly looking away again. Wilbur's expression stays fixated on Carson.

"Well, well, well," Joko grins at him, "I've heard so much about you, Techno. I think this is the first time we've met face-to-face. Wow, I can't believe I'm actually seeing you!"

"You don't even have the *guts* to show me your real face," He responds blandly, narrowing his hard stare at Joko's mask, "You have no right to call this a face-to-face contact."

Joko shrugs. "Not like I can see much of you, either."

"What have you done to Travis?!"

Joko laughs at this. "What does it look like I've done? I've protected him, something *you could never do*."

"Protected him from what?" He points to him, "His *phone?"*

"No, from you guys! From all of you guys. Why else is he not dead yet? It's because of *me. I saved him!* When you left him to *die* in that hospital, *I was the one who saved him."*

Techno stops, and is left speechless at this.

*He's... Right.*

Travis doesn't say anything either. Instead, he gives Techno a sad look; like as if he is pitying him.

Techno looks down at Carson, whose groaning underneath Wilbur and Schlatt's forces.

"You have me anyway," He says, "So let him go."

Wilbur gives him a confused stare, and looks up to Joko. Joko shrugs.

"Guess so. I didn't really think you'd give in that fast, though. Wilbur, Schlatt. Let him go."

Wilbur hesitantly releases his grip on Carson, and the injured boy stumbles up to his feet. Techno walks forward as Carson runs toward him.

"Schlatt, make sure he doesn't try to run," Joko nods at him. Schlatt obliges, and he runs up to Techno, twisting his hands behind

his back to stop him from escaping. As he holds his hands behind his back, he whispers quickly in his ear:

"Don't worry."

*Don't worry? What's that supposed to mean?*

"Technoblade.." Carson breathes, stopping as he faces Techno, "I —I'm sorry.. I.. W..Why.. *Why* would you *do that..?* I've known you for only a day, so why would you do this to yourself..?"

Techno looks at the desperate, wounded boy. He gives him a pitiful, defeated smile; Why else would he have done it?

"Because it's the right thing to do—"

*BANG.*

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A few seconds pass. Everything is frozen in time, only for a moment.

Until Carson drops to the floor.

"Carson?" Techno gapes, watching as Carson drops to his knees before him. Blood begins to seep out from his chest. Techno's eyes grow wide as he falls to his knees, holding Carson in his arms.

"T..Techno..." He chokes, blood already beginning to dribble down his mouth. He looks up with his pleading, hazel eyes, at the dark ceiling of the bridge.

"I.. I never wanted to win," He whimpers softly, whilst holding his hand, "All I wanted... Was to just.. *Avenge Ted. That's all.* T..Technoblade, p-please.. *Please promise me one thing. Promise me that you'll kill Joko for me... "*

"Carson, stop."

"H... Hey... *Techno.. Blade... P.."*

His voice trails off before he can finish, and slowly, the shimmer that was once in his eyes fades away.

And this time, he knows it's not coming back.

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His phone buzzes.

As Techno holds him in his arms, he looks up, and sees Wilbur holding out a gun.

"You.. *You killed him."*

"I had to," Wilbur says.

*"How could you?"* He yells at him, "You lied to him! You said you'd let him go!"

He stands up, and is about to run at Wilbur when Schlatt aggressively grabs him by the hand.

"Let go of me, traitor!" He shrieks, but Schlatt doesn't budge, nor respond. Instead, he's looking down at Carson's lifeless body.

"Schlatt," Joko says solemnly, "Take him."

Schlatt doesn't move.

"Schlatt?" Joko repeats.

Schlatt does not answer.

Instead, he pulls Techno towards him, and moves his hand to his pocket. Techno stops, and looks at him.

He pulls out his phone and checks it quickly, before letting out a smug grin from under his stare.

"Joko.." He laughs, returning his phone back into his pocket as he steps away from Techno.

"You've just been scammed, you motherfucker."

- - -

In an instant, a long zip-Iine shoots out from above Techno, reaching out a few hundred meters away before linking to the top of another arched bridge in the distance.

*A grappling hook.*

A boy whose holding this grappling hook zooms from behind, grabbing Techno with an arm while he flies through the air on the zip-line like as if he were spider man.

"Get boofed!" He hears Schlatt yell out, whipping out a grappling hook of his own as shoots towards the location Techno is flying at.

He holds tightly onto the boy, watching as they soar through the air, from underneath a bridge to the peak of another one.

As Techno looks up to see who saved him, he's completely baffled.

*Connor?!*

Connor however isn't looking back at him, but rather his gaze is focused on the bridge ahead. His brown hair blows elegantly in the wind of the dead night, and his blue eyes are twinkling under the reflection of the city's lights.

"C-Connor?!" He manages to croak out, wind also smashing against his face. Connor gives him a presumptuous grin.

"I never actually did anything like this before," He smiles, returning his stare to the bridge ahead, "But I feel really cool."

As they race along the skylines on the grappling hook's zip-line, they make it to the other side; With a swift landing, Connor holds Techno as he lands on top of the large, concrete arch bridge. The hook turns out to be locked around the metal fences, which were placed parallel at the sides of the bridge to prevent anyone from falling off.

Connor let's go of Techno and runs to the edge, watching Schlatt follow their tail as he darts along his own zip-line.

The bridge was awfully tall — taller than the one before. A drop could send you straight to your death.

As Schlatt nears the bridge, Techno hears something snap.

*"ARGHH!"* Schlatt shrieks, as the cord to his zipline snaps.

"Schlatt!!" Connor yells, and he tries to pull the hook from the barrier but it's not working. Just then, Techno remembers.

Without thinking, he pulls out his grappling hook from his pocket and throws it down at Schlatt.

"Catch!" Techno calls out, and to his relief Schlatt manages to clutch it before he can hit the ground. He shoots it at the fence of the bridge, darting up.

Connor and Techno help pull him over the fence, and once they do they all fall to their knees, completely out of breath.

As Techno pants, he looks up at the two, both in utter shock and solace.

"Why?" He breathes, "Why did you save me? Even *after* I walked away from you? "

Schlatt looks up at him, but Connor is the one that speaks.

"Well, I had to repay my debt somehow," He grins again, "After all, you *did* save my life."

Techno smiles a little at this, before returning to his serious stare.

"But.. I walked *away* from you guys. I lose your trust," He says, "Because of me, I dragged you all into this mess just because I insisted on trying to find my friend. I—I'm supposed to hate you guys.. *So why did you save me?"*

Schlatt breathes in, before getting back up on his feet.

"Because you're my friend."

*What?*

He takes another deep breath.

"Joko's plan was to kill both of you. I don't know how he would have done it with Travis being there, but knowing him he probably had some scheme already set up. I knew there was no good way out of this for you or Carson, and that's probably why you got a DEAD END.

Me and Connor had agreed that night to break up from Joko's alliance to save you from your dead end."

He takes out his phone to check the DEAD END message.

And slowly he sees the DEAD END message fade away.

*It's gone. I dodged a dead end.*

"A dead end.. It's determined by your future," Techno realises, "And the only way to reverse a dead end.. Is if someone else breaks from *their* future to save yours."

"Exactly," Schlatt snaps his fingers, and Connor nods eagerly, "At least, that's what I had deduced. If we broke apart from our alliance to save you, we'd probably save your future. I bargained with my diary at the price of all my supplies, and it had told me you'll likely reach a dead end tonight."

*Why would he do all of this to save me? Didn't he betray me?*

"Look. I didn't do this because I'm expecting you to give us something in return," He says quietly, looking at him with sincere eyes, "I did this because I like you. And I still cherish our friendship, and I want to make up for what I did to hurt you. If you want to, you can walk away from us right now, and I swear we won't ever lay a finger on you."

He closes his eyes.

"Listen. I don't care if you turn against me, or if you practically hate me, or even if you want to kill me and Connor," He says, "Because if I ever die at your hands.. At least I'll know that I died as a loyal man of my word. I'll die as someone who *saved* a friend."

Techno looks down for a minute.

If Schlatt and Connor really did mean to hurt him, they wouldn't have risked their lives to save him, right?

They wouldn't go through such extreme measures just to have Joko's alliance completely lose trust in them, *right?*

Suddenly, their phones all buzz at once.

***USER 4** HAS BEEN SHOT BY **USER 13.***

***USER 4 HAS REACHED A DEAD END.***

"Wait, Wilbur died?!" Connor suddenly exclaims, "What the fuck?!"

Schlatt starts to yell something, but Technoblade doesn't hear.

Maybe that's because he has fallen unconscious.

# 【 GOD ENCOUNTER #4 】

**GOD ENCOUNTER #4**

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***THE CURRENT CHART:***

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Hey Techno."

He opens his eyes, and of course he's greeted by God once again, whose sitting on a throne-like chair in front of him. This time, instead of opening his mouth, he quickly looks around him to see who else is there.

"Don't worry. You're the only one here."

Something about God's tone had made him sound more serious than usual, and he notices that this is the first time God isn't acting so cheery.

"Why am I here?" He asks solemnly, getting up on his two feet. God sits back on his chair.

"I brought you here because there are a number of things I need to tell you."

He looks around. "Where are your assistants, anyway?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know? You're God, shouldn't you know—"

"I just *don't know, okay?!"*

He face palms. "They could be anywhere right now, and frankly I couldn't care less where. I didn't bring you here so we can talk about them."

"Right, you brought me here to tell me something special," Techno folds his arms, smirking, "A little biased God, wouldn't you say?"

God shrugs. "Fine, I'll admit. *I want you to win Mirai SMP."*

.....

*What?*

*I— I was joking, I was joking God. What do you mean by that? That was just a joke.*

"... What?" He blinks, "You're.. You're not actually serious, right?"

"I'm dead serious," God stands up from his throne, "I want you to win the game. But it's not as simple as it sounds. I don't have the power to control your motives nor your behaviour."

"B-But, you're.. *God."*

"Yes, I am God. But how would you define a God? My definition of God is a being who controls the very existence of the Universe. But even so, a God like me doesn't have all the power. A God like me is nothing but pathetic."

He looks down.

"If I truly did hold all the power in the universe, Mirai SMP would have never happened."

And while he can't see his face, he can swear— and even if he felt it for only a split second — He swears he could feel his pity. However, this misery is quickly replaced by God's annoyingly flighty personality again.

"Anyways, enough of me! This isn't about *me,* this is about *you!"*

He puts his hands behind his back, as he walks over to Techno.

"I've been observing you carefully throughout the weeks of this game," He says slyly, "And I've noticed something about your.. *character,* that differs from the rest of the players. Something about you had intrigued me, and I want to know more. I've watched you closely, and I've managed to pick up on a lot of subtle characteristics."

*My character? Players? We're* ***humans,*** *not some characters off a video game.*

"What am I, a character from some movie?" He growls.

"Actually, I'd say more like a series. A movie only lasts for a few hours."

Something about this pisses him off and gets on his nerves.

"What is *wrong* with you?" He snaps, "Have you not a *shred of sympathy* for us humans? Are we nothing more than just your toys to play with?"

God turns to look at him, and through a crack in his mask, Technoblade can see his eyes.

God's crimson, red eyes stare further than him; they stare through to his soul, penetrating and shattering his confidence with his coruscating and petrifying eyes.

*"You're a murderer,"* God says, "Who are you to tell me what is *humane* and what is not*?"*

He walks over to him, until he's only a few feet away.

"You have no chance at winning this game in your current state."

He blinks.

"What.. What do you mean?"

"You're too stubborn. You refuse to open your eyes to the

situation you're put in. You're too fixated on what you believe is right— You're too focused on your *morals*."

God walks around him as he speaks, his tone formal and cold. Techno clenches his fist.

"Because unlike *you,* God, *I'm a human.* I have *sympathy,* I have *emotions.* Something you could never understand."

God stops, and he sighs.

"Fine then. Let me put it this way; Tell me, Technoblade. If you're so against the ideology of 'murder', then answer me this. Why did you accept the job of being a *hitman's assistant?"*

"I... Well, Because... I *needed* a job, and money."

"So you're telling me you are willing to work alongside people who *kill other humans* for your own sake of making a living?"

"No, no that's different," He argues back, "I don't kill anyone. We only eradicate criminals or people who've committed felonies. I don't—"

"So you're saying that you are willing to *indirectly* kill somebody who you believe is *wrong* if that means *you* can earn a living? Doesn't that make you just as bad as them? As bad as everybody else in this world? As bad as *me?"*

He's left speechless at this.

*Because he knows its true.*

"You humans are the embodiment of greed," He hisses at him, walking around as he puts a cold hand on his shoulder.

"It's what I can never understand about your kind. You complain, you cry, you point fingers at people when they do something wrong, yet you all do the same. You're all selfish, but you're all just too stubborn to admit it. Or rather, you don't want to believe that you are."

He takes a hand from his shoulder and walks away.

"And that supposedly makes up the psychological aspects of this game. This game; Mirai SMP. While it's been created against my wishes, I have discovered that it's not all about killing or alliances. But rather, that it's meant to put a human's real *greed* to test. To stretch the potential of an individual human's selfishness— the extent they're willing to push to in order to protect themselves. In a sense, this game is a game playing with an individual's mind. How each player perceives the world— Their human morals."

He turns around to face Techno.

"It's not everyday a human is placed in a Life of Death position. Which had made me curious about Mirai SMP. Curious to know how an individual would react when one is placed in to a position like this; A position where you as a human have to decide whether what you believe is morally right, or what you believe will keep

you safe. Would one be willing to sacrifice what makes them *human* in order to become something far more greater than one? Or rather, would one refuse to contradict these morals, driving them to play the game based only on emotions.

"It makes you question how humane someone can really be— It makes one question the purpose of humankind's morality itself. Is it right to kill someone if it means saving yourself? That's up the player to decide."

He sits back down at his throne, leaning against the armrest as he kicks his legs over the other armrest. He cracks his knuckles, before turning to Techno. He summons a chair behind him, and gestures for him to sit down.

"Technoblade," He continues, as Techno hesitantly takes a seat, "You on the other hand.. I found that you're quite... Uh, what's the word? Unpredictable; As a both a player *and* human.

I've played around with your surroundings and fate quite a lot throughout the game, but no matter what I do I cannot understand your motives. I have given you so many opportunities to kill someone— I have given you strong statistics, a threatening nickname, I placed a *bounty* on you to get you moving, I've given you an OP *diary* that can locate any victim in the future, I've hinted countlessly that the strongest player of the game is on your tail, I even gave you a DEAD END— Yet not once have you ever been willing to hunt for blood. And I couldn't understand that."

"Because of that, I couldn't figure you out— I couldn't figure out *your* specific motive. Everybody in this game is set with a motive that pushes them to keep fighting in order to be crowned the winner. Without a motive, one is left feeling conflicted. Conflicted between what is wrong and what is right. And it's already obvious to me that your focus is not on becoming God. So let me ask you in person.

Why do you want to win, Technoblade? What on Earth is keeping you so driven to *survive?"*

Technoblade looks down, and thinks about this for a solid minute.

*Why is he fighting?*

Now that he's really faced with the question, it hits him— What is his motive? His *goal?*

Poke's goal was to bring back his bird. Carson's goal was to avenge his friend.

*So what's his reason to fight?*

As he submerges himself deep within his conscious mind, he remembers. The reason why all of this is happening— It's to find his

friend.

His motive is to survive for his friends. For Schlatt, for Connor, for Cooper.

For Travis.

That's his motive.

"I want to survive for my friends," Techno looks up at God.

- - -

A nintendo switch hits him in his face.

"That's a shit reason."

"What was that for?!"

"To knock some sense into you."

He leans against his hand, with his elbow propped on the armrest.

"However.. I did expect that answer coming from you. And now that you've told me, my suspicions have been confirmed."

*What is he talking about?*

"Oh whatever, Mr-I-know-everything-but-I-can't-read-people's-thoughts."

God frowns from behind his mask and folds his arms.

"Technoblade," He says, "Why do you think you're ranked a 1 in Teamwork?"

His gaze is fixed on God as he asks him this, and immediately his head is filled with quite possible outcomes for this; all of which connect to each other. All of which make sense.

It's clear. Because he's weak. He was too weak to protect his friends, and because of that everybody he holds close to him die at his hands.

He looks down at his open palm, and closes his eyes.

"I couldn't protect them. Cooper, Travis, Schlatt, Connor.. *Carson.* It's like every time I grow close to someone, I mess things up, and I put them in danger. Because I'm *weak."*

"You're wrong."

He looks up, and God stares back from behind his mask. He's sitting only a few feet away from him.

"You're not ranked a 1 in teamwork because you cant protect people. Your weakness isn't your strength," He says, getting up and walking over to him, before jabbing a finger in the boy's chest.

"It's your *heart.* You trust people too easily; You can't let yourself move on from your past mistakes; You can't let go of other people, and you let your emotions get the better of you, even if it means risking your life. Because of that, the people you're close to are killed. That's why I ranked you a 1."

*My heart?*

"And that's what I have noticed from you," God continues, "You're

somebody who thinks with your heart. Or rather, someone who thinks as any *humane person;* You'd prefer to play the game safe, but if that means putting someone else's life at risk, you won't hesitate to break that moral. You act on what you feel is right as a *human being*. And I've noticed you're always constantly questioning your morality — How it is to be human."

He walks behind him and puts his hands on his shoulders.

"Unlike almost everybody else in this game, you're still constantly grasping onto humanity's morals too tightly. You're too focused — No, too *blinded* on what you believe is the right thing for a person to do. You put your faith in other people too easily because you're *afraid of hurting them.* That's why I find you such a frustrating, yet intriguing person."

His hands are like ice against his shoulders, and he feels a shiver run up his spine as God's words echo throughout his mind.

He's nailed it exactly. In fact, he had read beyond his mind and straight to his very soul. And because of this, he finds himself paralysed with *fear*.

*God really is all knowing.*

"Teamwork ties in with manipulation, which is a vital aspect of this game. That's how Joko has managed to get so many people on his side. In a game like this, teamwork is crucial to surviving. In your case however, you're forced to take an entirely different approach."

He walks around and bends down onto his knees in front of Techno, hands placed on his legs. He spreads open his large, black dragon-like wings.

And he can see that look in his eyes again— Through the crevices of his mask, he can see an almost *hypnotising*, pair of red glowing eyes burning with such powerful desire.

*"*To kill, or to be killed. To hide, or to risk," He whispers, "To win, you must eliminate anybody in your path. To win, you must have *power, and control*. You must push past your limits and *kill.* In a game like this, risk is the only word in your vocabulary."

He leans closer to him, his hands running up to his waist.

"Your actions shall be based solely on the conception of *gambling itself*. Risk. *Risk everything if that means you'll have a chance at winning.* Trust in only *yourself, and your own capabilities."*

And his gaze is locked in with his, unable to look away from his mesmerising, scarlet eyes as God leans against him.

*"Your enemies aren't the people trying to kill you. Your enemies are the people who trust you."*

He intertwines his fingers with his, and he's hit with a piercing sense of both terror and sheer inclination.

"You know what they say, Technoblade. Keep your friends close, but your *enemies closer*. Walk alongside your enemies— Alongside the people who *trust* you. And when the end game nears, *strike*. Turn against them and strike behind their backs. *That's how you'll win the game."*

He pulls Techno up from his seat, as he strides behind him once again. He puts his head on his shoulder, holding out his arm as he whispers in his ear.

"You've been deprived of hunger for so long, now let yourself *starve,"* He breathes, "Let go of your beliefs and gain your *thirst for blood*. Don't let yourself be held back. *You're like a wolf trying to be a deer. You cannot hide, you were born to hunt.*

"So use it, take advantage of it, and *kill."*

And like a chain reaction, the last of the pieces connect; His mind clears, stimulated as he feels his nerves send some sort of electrical impulse throughout his veins and wires in his brain.

His goal is clear now.

*"I **will become God**."*

# ➳ CHAPTER 23: musicians and freedoms

CHAPTER **23; musicians and freedoms**

*(PLEASE play the music this time. its super important in setting the mood!! and yes, I am a weeb)*

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***JOKO***

"You've just been scammed, you motherfucker."

Before he has the chance to say something, Connor comes zooming in out of nowhere, holding a grappling-hook gun and capturing Technoblade as he flies off.

"Schlatt! What are you thinking?" Wilbur exclaims, stumbling up, "What about the alliance?! Don't you know what you're putting yourself into?!"

"Alliance?" He looks at him, "What alliance? All I see are bunch of blood-thirsty *monsters.* I don't want an alliance with you. I want an alliance with my *real* friends."

He whips out his grappling hook, and aims it towards where Connor's is attached to.

Wilbur breaks off into a sprint, but Joko grabs his wrist before he can run. Wilbur spins around, bewildered at this.

"It's too late," He whispers, "He's chosen a different path. We can't change that."

"Get boofed!" Schlatt yells as he breaks away from the team, leaving the three alone under the bridge in the desolate night.

"No.." Wilbur stammers, "No.. But... The plan was *flawless.* I-If we had just stuck to the plan.."

Joko closes his eyes, and lets go of his grip from Wilbur's arm. He steps back beside the speechless Travis, whose expression is blank.

Wilbur falls to his knees, guitar falling from his shoulders.

"... What do we do now..?" Travis asks quietly. His voice shakes as he asks this, and immediately Joko can sense that he's hurt.

He would be too, if he were him.

He shuts his eyes tighter, as he feels his head ache. He slides his hand into his pocket, letting his fingers coil around a gun.

*Schlatt and Connor have betrayed the team. A foolish move on their behalf, but it is what it is. It sucks, really. I really thought this alliance would last a little longer, and I kinda had hope that Wilbur's idea would push us to the top five. But now that won't work. We are now in a*

*vulerable position.*

"Travis," He asks him, "You know what would have happened if I never saved you that night, right?"

"... I'd be dead."

He opens his eyes and looks at him through his mask; Travis' dark brown eyes is locked on his.

"I knew you were going to die that night. And that's why I needed to save you. Something in my gut told me that you needed me. *And you still do.* You need me, Travis. *If I'm not by your side, you're in danger."*

Travis doesn't look away. Instead, he nods slowly as he whispers. "Thank you for protecting me, Joko."

He turns to look back at Wilbur, whose frozen in his spot. Joko takes a deep breath in an attempt to maintain a stern voice, and walks over to him.

"Schlatt and Connor turned on us, just like I predicted. The plan is scrapped. The alliance is broken."

*God dammit. I'm sorry, Wilbur.*

He raises his gun, using all his willpower to keep a steady hand.

"What..?" Wilbur murmurs, head hanging low with his back still facing toward him. Joko takes a few steps forward, hitting the muzzle of the gun against the back of his head.

"I am left with no other plausible choice involving us three that will benefit me and Travis' game. I am afraid I have to resort to my former plan, Plan B."

He looks over to Travis.

"Travis, I suggest you cover your eyes."

*I am so fucking sorry.*

"Joko?" Wilbur asks, his voice breaking. But he doesn't move.

*Why isn't he saying his catchphrase? Doesn't he know?*

Nonetheless, he pulls the trigger, and the last thing Wilbur does is strum one final chord on his guitar.

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*He took a deep breath, before strumming the G chord.*

*"I'm in love with an, I'm in love with an, I'm in love with an E-Girl—"*

*The guitar suddenly gets kicked from his hands, and he looked up only to see the same group of senior boys.*

*"Hey there pretty boy, what'd you got in your hands?"*

*A senior boy picked up the piece of paper placed beside Wilbur.*

*"Hey! Give it back!" He exclaims, trying to take back the piece of paper. The senior laughs, pushing him back as he reads it out loud to his friends.*

*" 'I wanna be the guy that you fall asleep on a call with'," He reads aloud, his friends bursting into fits of intimidating, chortling laughter.*

*Wilbur's face flushes with embarrassment as he yells, "Stop, give it back! Please, just gi—"*

*" 'I'll make you forget every guy that came before me.' Hahaha, you's hearing this? What is this, a love letter to a slut?"*

*He waves the paper up high in his hands, too high for Wilbur to reach. More howling sniggers erupted through the group of friends.*

*"In love with an E-Girl?" The other kid mocked, "Man, that's got to be the whitest thing I've ever heard!"*

*As the older kids ridiculed him, older boy ripped the paper in half, and snatched the guitar from the trembling Wilbur's hands; whose almost on the verge of tears.*

*"Wanna see a magic trick?" He snorted, waving his guitar around to his friends, "I know how to turn this into a Ukelele!"*

*With an aggressive hand, he snapped two strings of Wilbur's guitar, making everybody laugh again.*

*"See? It's got 4 strings now. Ukulele, right? I've done my research."*

*"M-My guitar!"*

*"Hey kid," He glared at him, kicking him down, "Did you listen to what I fucking said? It's a fucking ukulele, **dumbass**."*

*"Yeah, **dumbass**," Another kid said, throwing a fist in Wilbur's gut, "Is the mirror the only thing you pay attention to?"*

*"Oh, oh, oh," Another kid exclaimed, grabbing the guitar from the other senior as he held it up, "I actually know a magic trick too! I can make this ukulele **disappear!**"*

*He ditched the guitar at a wall nearby them, smashing it into pieces. The seniors snickered again, cackling with laughter as they walked away.*

*"Pretty boy," He had said before walking off, "Just give up already. Nobody wants to listen to your stupid shitty songs."*

*And while this had been going on for years, Wilbur had forced himself to grow used to this. To grow used to being constantly judged.*

*But that day, something in him had changed. He had enough.*

*Ever since then, he had quit music, and swore to never touch his guitar again.*

*Years passed before the day he had received the news about Mirai SMP. The day he had found himself standing on the podium, God giving everyone his introduction.*

*"18 years old and writes his own music for a career."*

*He hadn't touched a guitar in years.. So why? Why did God lie like that?*

*And clutching the phone tightly in his hands, he re-read the email sent by God over and over again. He spent the night laying down in his bed, unable to sleep as his mind is flooded with the same question:*

*Why should he become God?*

*He looked over at his old guitar, which was leaning against the wall in the corner of his room. Dust had already been embedded on the brims of the worn-out, scratched-up and poorly taped together instrument.*
*As he stared at it, his vision is clouded with memories from his past.*

*He's always dreamt of becoming a real musician without the constant fear of being judged. All his life, he's lived in the never-ending fear of people's discrimination.*

*That's why he had quit music.*

*But maybe, just maybe, this game could change that.*

*If he could just become God, he could create a world where people don't need to be judged all the time. A world for people like him to finally have the freedom to express themselves through music; A world where aspiring musicians like him are no longer afraid.*

*That's what he wants; He wants people to be free from judgement. A world where music lasts for lifetime, where music can live on forever.*

*That's why he wants to become God. So he can give people like him the childhood they deserved.*

*And as he breathed his last, dying breath today, this flashed before his mind. Mere seconds before the life in him was sucked out, he knew he failed this mission. The end of his fate was sealed.*

*And as Joko had pulled the trigger, he had also realised that he felt no resentment towards the man. Because despite his dream crumbling into ruins, he had realised that throughout this experience he's gained back something he never could have imaged of gaining — his love for music again.*

*And despite knowing that he was unable to win, he's filled with a much different sense of accomplishment.*

*He may have lost the battle, but he sure as hell won his war.*

*That's when it dawned on him - That is why God had lied that day.*

*To let him love music again.*

*Before his last ounce of strength gave out, he moved his fingers to play one, last final chord of his guitar.*

*Chord G.*

*And he realises that he can now die a man who has fulfilled his dream. His dream of finally breaking free from judgement.*

*His dream of being a musician.*

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***PLAYER NUMBER 9***

He sits cross-legged on the rooftop of the large building, staring out into the unknown distances of the night sky's clusters of stars, with a heavy and glazed-over eye. The wind hits against his face as he does so; hard enough to blow down his hood, allowing his hair to flutter along with the breeze.

He glances over at his friend, whose laying down not too far from him, fast sleep with a thin blanket draped over him. He's suddenly relaxed with a sudden wave of calmness.

His gaze retreats back to the outline of land and buildings contrasting with the sky; the skylines, defining against the star-plastered abyss and cities.

For as long as he can remember, he's lived with this draining feeling; this feeling of dry emptiness, like he's missing something inside of him.

And while looking at his friend does cease the feeling only the slightest, the vacant feeling still lingers on.

However, nothing can fix that missing piece inside him— The unfixed hole in his heart.

He puts a hand to the eyepatch covering his eye, brushing his fingers over it lightly as he vividly remembers the day; the day he gotten this eyepatch.

He had stabbed his own eye out when he was 16 years old.

And despite the unrefined irony and sociopathy in this, that day had ended up becoming one of the most greatest days of his god forsaken life.

All his life, he was caged within the walls of what his parents would force him to call 'home'.

And despite it being the only place he's ever known his whole life, not once had he *ever* felt like it was his *real* home.

His parents were wealthy, and because of that they afforded to live in a large house.

Except they concealed the windows with concrete walls, and locked the doors leading to outside with a chain only they had the power to unlock - All because they wanted Ryan to live a life *they* wanted to control.

And because of this, he felt miserable, and lonely; forbidden to do what he wanted, he never truly felt like *himself*. His parents had pushed onto him the dreams and career *they* wanted him to pursue. They demanded for him to study to become an architect, to 'pass on their tradition.'

And somehow, in spite of his resentment towards them, he found himself complying to this demand — And while a normal kid at the age of 8 would play outside with their friends, his father had already controlled him into studying blueprints for hours locked up inside his room.

He hated the place, and he hated his parents.

But most of all, he hated how they tricked him into falling in their trap; He hated how he felt safe in his miserable home despite his longing to see the real world; He hated how he wanted to

become an architect, despite him being forced into doing so; And he hated being lonely, despite his will to be alone. One contradicting thought over another, it made him feel an empty dread in the pits of his stomach.

Which is why he dreams that someday, he can re-build a kingdom and become an architect— Not because of his parents forcing him to, but in hopes of somehow also re-building that missing piece inside of him. Listening to what his parents had said, and he's forced himself to believe in that for years.

Until only a few months after his 16th birthday on December — Weeks before Mirai had took place, he began to open his eyes to the reality he was manipulated by his parents into living in.

He had craved a longing of seeing the outside world— To see the *light*.

And one night without thinking, he had stabbed out his left eye, in hopes that he'd be taken outside to the hospital.
So he could have a chance to see the outside world for the first time.

He can still remember the piercing sirens of the ambulance tearing through the night; the sight of seeing people other than his own parents, crowding around him; and, while even if it was only for a few moments, *he could see the light.*

The wound from the veins in his left eye must have messed up his vision somehow, resulting in him seeing a heavy blur of lights, flashes and colours. While his vision in his other eye was vague, it was enough for him to see at least the outlines of what was going on around him.

His adrenaline had numbed the pain, and for only a few brief moments he felt something in him.

He felt *happiness*. And *freedom.*

After being rushed at the hospital, his numbness wore off, and his eye began to burn with an excruciating and agonising pain. A stab to the eye could have penetrated through the skull to the brain, and he remembers vaguely how the doctors were surprised that he was still alive.

A few days had passed of surgery being done on his eye, and one night he decided to sneak out the hospital into the real world for good; and that was when he had saw a boy, sitting alone at a bench crying.

But that wasn't the point. The point was, despite losing complete sight in his eye and being put through absolute *torture* for days— He had not regretted a single thing. That moment; He would *never forget it.*

*So why.. Why can't I feel like that again? I only have so many eyes to*

*stab. And I don't want to be blind, either. I'm starting to sound like a sadist now.*

This game he had been put in was almost like a sign of freedom. Yet, now that he's here, finally broken free from his parent's chains; he still feels *empty*.

But he's free, right? So why is he still feeling the same as before?

Ryan sighs, as he lays down.

He has no motivation to fight nor to become God. He has utterly run out of his will to continue anything.

At least, that's what he had thought. But for some reason, he's still pushing on.

He looks at Altrive again.

"Could he be the reason..?" He mumbles, before drifting into sleep.

# ➳ CHAPTER 24: for the better

**chapter 24 ; for the better**

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***TECHNOBLADE***

Eyes snapping open, he sees himself still laying down at the bridge, looking up at Connor and Schlatt.

"So what did God say?" Connor immediately inquires, eagerly leaning into Techno before retrieving a harsh nudge from Schlatt.

"*Hey, dumbass,"* He hisses, "That doesn't *help."*

"Oh, right, uh- Sorry, I forgot," He chuckles nervously, "Old habits die hard. No need to tell us anything if you don't want to, Techno."

Techno sits up, blinking as his mind settles back into reality, diffusing between what was all in his head and what is real.

Whatever thoughts he was debating about before has now merged into one goal. He smiles at them, before opening his mouth.

"Ha," He scoffs, "Of course I'll stick with you. You saved my life, even after everything that happened. *I know I can trust you guys."*

Connor claps enthusiastically, and Schlatt throws a victorious fist in the air.

Technoblade's allows his gaze to settle on the view from the bridge, spacing out at nothing in particular as his expression returns neutral.

His mind whizzes with thoughts; something he's never felt himself experience before, but he's not complaining.

*Going solo is a pretty tempting route, and it would make it easier for me to get through to the final three considering I won't have to worry about protecting anyone other than myself.*

*But judging by the way this game is playing out, I don't see that being a good path I should take. Like God had said, this game is also about alliances, and while going solo doesn't necessarily guarantee me a disadvantage too serious, there are better ways to go at it.*

*If I want to survive to the finals, I have to get through with an alliance of my own first. Otherwise, I'll be an easy target. I want to make sure I find my victims, not be found first—*

"—And then we'll be able to get to top three, because I'm the smart business man and the only person here who knows how to pull off a cool rescue plan."

He blinks, and Schlatt is looking at him with a partially-joking

face.

"I don't think he was listening," Connor says after a minute, and Schlatt just frowns, rolling his eyes.

"Uh, sorry," Techno shakes his head and gets up, and the other boys do the same, "How do we get to top three again?"

"We stick together, hide, camp out, whatever. We wait out for the others to fight each other out until there's probably one other person. Then we ambush the fourth player, leaving us three to battle it out."

"What about the 'cool rescue plan' part?"

"That just made me sound smarter. There is no cool rescue plan."

Techno raises both his hands, shaking his head at this. "Okay, whatever. That is a mortifyingly amateur plan anyway."

"Okay, fine then," Connor says, "We'll keep in the cool rescue plan."

"Heh? No, no, no," Technoblade waves him off, taking a step back as he shoots them a dissatisfied glare, "I mean, that sounds even worse worse. But I meant the hiding part. What do you think we are, hyenas? No, we're humans. Humans capable of wielding a sword and shield."

He jabs a finger at Schlatt's chest before saying; "So do you know what we're going to do, Mr. Jschlatt?"

"Uhhh," He stutters, eyes darting frenetically between Connor and Technoblade, "We're.. Going to train..?"

"No, *hunt,"* He snaps, *"Hunt,* you noob. We're going to *hunt,* and that is what we're going to do until we're the very last ones standing."

His phone buzzes, and he pulls it out from his pocket, reading the new message while his friends wait in anticipation:

*PLAYERS NUMBER 9 AND 10 ARE SLEEPING ON A ROOFTOP OF AN APARTMENT. ONE IS AWAKE, THE OTHER IS ASLEEP.*
*THEY ARE 40KM AWAY.*
*100% ALLIED. THEY ARE NOT AWARE OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR PRESENCE.*

"Oh," He grins mischievously, looking up at Schlatt and Connor; eyes twinkling with a feverish sly and scheming shimmer within the star-filled night.
"I think we found our first targets."

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***PLAYER NUMBER 10***

"Ryan! Ryan, did you see what happened?!"

He runs up to his friend, shoving his phone in his face.
"Yeah, Carson's dead. I know."

"And so is #4. Two people died last night and I didn't even *know*.."

He pauses, and tilts his head. "Wait a minute.. How come you didn't even tell me? You mean you actually let me sleep *through all of that?!"*

"Altrive, dude. We went through like 2 days without sleeping," He laughs gently, shrugging, "You looked like you needed rest."

"But *two people died!"*

"Hey, at least those two people weren't us."

Altrive throws his hands up, rolling his eyes. "Okay, fine. But if you die and I end up sleeping through that somehow, just know that that's all your fault and you don't have the right to curse me."

He nudges him playfully, "Not if we're together. If I die, you're going down with me."

Altrive winces, rubbing his arm as he watches Ryan walk over and pick up his bag. It was true, he had went 2 nights without rest.

Mainly because they had spent that time venturing through the cities and country; renting motorbikes, running through the bushes, sleeping through night shifts.

He supposes that the pressure of all this is why he wasn't able to sleep. When it was his shift to rest, he'd only lay down with his eyes open, waiting to fall asleep but unable to. Ryan apparently couldn't sleep that well either, hence resulting in the both of them having a pretty messed up sleep schedule. Not that he's ever really had the best sleep schedule to begin with.

He'd spend nights staying up studying for his exams in medical training, working to the goal of earning a diploma for being a surgeon. He's already taking doctor courses, having skipped a few grades in order to boost the beginning of his career even further.

But Altrive doesn't want to be a doctor — Not *one bit.* But he was left with no other option, as his parents had forced this unto him. In truth, he had always wanted to sculpture - or even perhaps *build* - something that would blow away people's minds.

*Like a kingdom, maybe.*

In spite of the path he was being forced to follow, he had never given up on his hope for achieving his *real* dream. And it's been that way for years— Every day, he would fight through the misery he'd be sat in, still longing and holding onto the very rope of hope itself.

*Always look on the bright side, is what I always told myself.*

Letting himself believe his future was hopeless would only jinx himself.

He looks down, before retaliating his gaze back at his friend, as he walked over to pick up his belongings.

"Since Carson is gone..." He murmurs, "What do we do now? We

travelled all the way here to try meet him."

"What do you think?" Ryan replies, sharpening his knife with a sheet of sandpaper, "We're gonna kill Joko."

"Joko?" Altrive queries. He slings his seemingly *too* light bag onto his shoulder, folding his arms. "You think we can.. Uh, *kill* him? Without dying?"

"If we play this right, we should. We're both a 3 in strength, and intel, so we're not all that bad," He looks at him with a deadpan expression, "Except you have a 5 in teamwork while I have a 4, but that doesn't really matter, right?"

"Right. So we hunt for Joko? Got it."

He checks his phone, but no new messages— As predicted. His diary told him the future in the form of injury. He can tell exactly how badly somebody will be injured in an upcoming fight, and if they will likely die or survive. The only catch was, he could only find this information out on anybody *other* than himself, meaning that he has to rely on Ryan's diary to watch his back. Ryan's diary told his future in the form of surroundings, giving him insight on what will happen to him and himself based on the surroundings on the environment.

"He needs to pay for what he did to Carson," Ryan hisses through clenched teeth, as his subdued, almost colourless navy blue eye narrow at the knife he's clutching in his hand.

Altrive gives him a sympathetic smile, frustration tugging at his insides as he watches his friend's dreary expression, without a single clue on why he feels that way.

*What on earth could he be thinking about right now?*

Ryan's never told him how he felt.

But maybe that was for the better.

# ➳ CHAPTER 25: repay for. your. debt.

**chapter 25 ; repay for. your. debt**
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***NUMBER 10 — ALTRIVE***

Ryan and Altrive had eventually settled on a plan; That plan being they wander aimlessly throughout the area until their diaries alert them of something new.

As they made their way out of the apartment building, they ran through the streets of an early morning suburb.

He runs behind his friend, watching as Ryan's raven hair blows back; for a pretty slim built, he makes running with a 100 tonne backpack on his back look easy.

He doesn't know much about the boy — For all he knows, Ryan could have been going to the gym his whole life.

*And then there's me, just a dude who plays video games on his computer in his spare time. Man, now I wish I paid attention in sports; this backpack is heavy as FUCK!*

"Ryan dude," He pants, "Why are we running?"

Ryan slows down, causing Altrive to crash into him.

"Good point," He muses, "Why are we running?"

Altrive rolls his eyes, and manages to crack a small smile. Breathless, he walks beside Ryan as they travel along the sidewalk. The question strikes him again; What *did* Ryan do before Mirai SMP? It can't hurt to ask, right?

"Hey Ryan," He asks after a minute or so, fiddling with his fingers, "I don't really know anything about you other than you're an architect. And that was because of the introductions God made at the start.. I just wanna know, uh.. How was your life before.. Well, this game..?"

Ryan doesn't look to him, and instead he responds blandly. "Not anything interesting. Just being an architect. What about you, aren't you a doctor?"

*Woah, he remembers that?*

"Kinda," He shrugs, "Not that I want to be."

"You're a doctor but you don't want to be one? How come?"

Now this was the question he had been afraid of being asked. He hasn't told anyone this before. But Ryan *was* his friend, and one of

the most important qualities of a friend is communication.

"Uh, I guess you could say it was 'cus my parents sorta forced me to become one. If I didn't, I wouldn't be able to make them proud. And in my mindset back then, that was all I ever wanted to happen."

Ryan looks down, and a few seconds pass before he murmurs.
".. You were lonely."

He can feel his heart beat inside his chest as he says this.

"It's a terrifying thought, knowing you're trapped and have nobody to turn to other than yourself. It's what you felt, right?"

He purses his lips. "All my life."

Ryan looks at him with dark blue eyes, making direct eye contact as he mumbles out:
"How did you find it?"

"Find what?"

"The strength to move on?" He asks, "Wouldn't you feel hopeless in your situation? Feeling like your miserable future was sealed?"

Altrive looks at him for a good few seconds.

"I guess I just kept believing.
Even though my situation was shitty and it looked nothing could get better. I had hope. Hope that someday I will break free from my parents strings and follow my own dream. And I guess.. I just held onto that hope. And I swore to myself I'd never let that go."

And he swears, even if it was for a split second, that he saw his eyes shine; Ryan is looking at him with an expression he's never seen before.

"... What do you want to be, then?" He whispers curiously.

"Well," Altrive scratches the back of his neck, ".. I want to build something that will blow away people's minds. Something telling them *my story* , something that will make people feel connected to what I create. And I want to make myself proud. Not my parents, *me."*

Ryan's cheeks flush to a light pink as he says this, and he's looking at him in some sort of awe; like as if a little kid had just met their idol. His uncovered eye is glimmering in the sunlight.

But then suddenly, Altrive's gaze shifts to an alleyway further ahead in the distance, blocked off by what seems like a barbed wire fence. Behind the fence seems to lead to another alleyway, and this makes him curious.

"Oh, over there!" He exclaims quickly, pointing to the fence as he runs into the alleyway. Ryan doesn't hesitate to run by his side.

As they reach the fence, Altrive stops, realising that the looming barriers were higher than he thought.

"Oh, turn around?" He asks, but Ryan's already starting to climb

up. His friend doesn't reply; but instead, responds with his hands clutching onto the wires, heaving himself up. Altrive follows his lead, climbing up the fence. Struggling, he makes it over, landing shakily onto the concrete path.

Ahead of them is another alleyway in another direction.

There are scattered boxes, cones covering the alleyway, and danger tapes plastered everywhere. It looks like a crime scene.

"Holy shit," Ryan mumbles, as he walks over to the other side.

"What?" Altrive replies, running towards his friend, whose bending low as he stares at...

*A chalk outline of a dead body.*

"Someone died here," Altrive blurts out, pulling down the danger tapes. Ryan opens his mouth to say something, when he's interrupted by a group of voices.

Ryan jerks his head towards the sound, and he pins himself up against a wall. Altrive does the same, peering out from the corner of the alleyway, over the danger tapes.

There are about two police cars, and a group of policemen. There's a girl with short, hot pink hair, talking to one of the policemen.

Altrive closes his eyes, as he tries to make out their conversation:

"... Just for clarification — He is 18 years old, and worked as a COP in the policeforce?" A policeman asks.

The girl nods, who looks like she is on the verge of tears, "And h-his name is Joko. Joko John. Y-You work with him, right?"

Another COP nods. "Yes, we did. We've been aware of his sudden disappearance for the past week, along with the filed murder of 'Pokay'. We've been working on the case—"

"Do you know where he is?! Is he alive? Can you at least tell me he's alive?!"

"Calm down," The policeman ushers, "We cannot confirm anything under the lack of information we have on this case. We are doing the best we can, I just need you to answer a few questions for me, OK?"

Altrive looks over at Ryan with an awe-struck expression. Ryan's eyes are wide, and he mouths 'JOKO?' at him.

"Where was the last place you've seen him?" The officer asks the girl.

"H-He was with me last time, in our house. And next morning, he was.. He was just *gone. Just like that...*"

"Has he told you anything regarding his disappearance?"

"Well, he told me he needed to leave. B-But I didn't think it would be so soon.."

"Do you know why he needed to leave?"

The girl goes quiet. "I.. He told me people are going to go after him if he stays longer.. I.. I don't know who or why.. I don't know anything. Please tell me you can find him, *please."*
She starts cry, and one of the police officers try to comfort and reassure her. Suddenly, Ryan lets out a yell, and Altrive turns around.

A police officer is holding him with one hand by his backpack; he shoots the boys an indignant, baleful stare. His chest is puffed out as he yells with a stern and remorseless, thunderous voice.
"What are you kids doing here? This area is strictly off-limits!"

"S-Sorry sir!" Altrive stutters, as the policeman drops Ryan to the floor, "We were lost, that's all!"

"Lost?" The policeman frowns sombrely, leaning close to Altrive as he spits, "How can you be *lost in the middle of a murder scene?* You kids better leave, or else I will hold you accountable for trespa—*"*

And then suddenly, the Guard's eyes flicker, with a demented scintillate in his pupils. His pupils roll to the back of his head, and he shoves a hand in his pocket; And just as quickly as it had happened, it rolls back, returning to its normal state.

Except his eyes are fulgurating with a lurid, cold-blooded stare; Almost *radiating* a pure, murderous hatred as the iris of his eye swirls to a lambent red — It's a type of look he's never felt nor seen before.

Those eyes were no longer the eyes of a solemn policeman. But rather, the eyes of a *maniac.*

"It's not his fault," Ryan speaks up, moving in front of Altrive to defend him, oblivious to the policeman's sudden change in character. Altrive grabs his wrist, whispering to Ryan.
*"We have to run."*

"You're saying this isn't your fault?" The officer's eyes grow wider, leaning closer to the boys, blocking them from an exit. The corners of his mouth curve upwards, as he pulls out a knife from his pocket.

"We'll see whose fault it is now once I'm *dead!"*

Before Altrive can have any time to react, the man raises the large knife and stabs it in his own throat.
As he stabs out his windpipes, blood immediately spurts out from the wound, turning his uniform to a damp, blood red shade. Altrive stumbles back against the wall, falling down as he watches the mesmerising scene.

Ryan stays still, watching as the officer skewers out his own throat with a butchers knife.

He takes out the knife, and jolts it back in again. He pulls it out,

and stabs again. He repeats this, more and more blood flowing and spraying out from his neck as he does so.

Drops of his blood spray onto Ryan's face, but most of it is either covering the officer's throat area or the floor.

*I feel sick.*

Altrive covers his mouth with his hands, numb as he watches the man kill himself. He feels tears rolling down his face.

"You left me to die, you *monsters,"* The officer croaks out, pools of blood seeping and spurting from down his brutally punctured neck as he falls to his knees.

Ryan looks down, frozen still as he watches the man collapse inches away from his feet.

Using his own blood, he scribbles down two words on the floor as he chokes out:

"*R-R-Rep..Repay... F- For.. Your deb-ebt.."*

On the floor, two words are written in blood.

*"KILL. TECHNOBLADE."*

Then, Ryan's phone buzzes.

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***5 HOURS EARLIER.***

***???***

"Fucking hell!" He yells, kicking down a chair, "He just had to throw that stupid curveball!"

"You think he knows?" He frowns at him.

He slumps back down into his seat, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I hope not. But if he did, you'd think he'd have probably stopped us or something by now."

"So you're saying what he did to him could have just been a coincidence?"

"Maybe, but either way it totally fucked everything over. Damn, he's smarter than I thought."

"Oh no.." He murmurs anxiously, fiddling with his fingers, "Does that mean we have to..?"

He closes his eyes, sighing. "Yeah. Clearly, what we're doing isn't good enough. We're going up against mind manipulation now, and that's stronger than just allowing a stranger to put their faith in you."

"But you said we weren't going to do anything else to mess up the game!" He whines, "It's chea—"

"Oh yeah? Try telling that to him, *I'm sure he'd love to know what the hell cheating is,"* He snaps sarcastically, "We're fixing up his mess. He's playing the game unfairly, so it's only even if we do the same."

"B-But you know what happens if we try doing it!"

"Has anyone ever tried doing it? No, didn't think so. It's not like

he can call us out, because he's doing the same thing! Why don't you get that, ■■■■■■?!"

"Don't call me by my real name!" He yells back, standing up.

"Why not? Because you want to stick to the shitty nicknames he gave us?!" He yells, also standing up, "You know what? I'm sick of this! I'm sick of you, I'm sick of him, I'm sick of everything! I can't stand always being told what I should be and what I should do, because that's just not me!!"

"He's doing it for our own good!" He shoots back, "You know very well that we're his only friends! We've been together for as long as we can remember, and you can't just abandon that because of your selfishness!"

"So *I'M* the one being selfish now, huh?! Take a look around you, ■■■■■■ — Who's the one in control here? Who's the one rigging the entire system just to get what he wants? Because I sure as hell know that's not me!"

"No.." He says, "No.. That's.."

But before he can finish, the boy grabs his arm, pulling up his sleeves to reveal a neon, glowing blue bracelet, which was tightened around his frail wrist.

"Whose the one that locked these chains around our wrists against our will? And the one who gave us these fake names? Who was it? If you're so damn sure that he's protecting us, then tell me why he's done this!"

"I..." He stutters, "I... I don't know."

He yanks his wrist, releasing his grip as he pulls up his own sleeves to reveal an illuminating, red bracelet.

"You know what?" He says, gripping a hold of the bracelet with his hand. With one forceful pull, he breaks it off him, releasing himself from his now torn-apart bracelet.

"I quit."

"Our friendship bracelet!!" ■■■■■■ exclaims, and he takes a minute to process his 'friend's abrupt blow up, before stating. "■■■■■■■, you know that's not going to do anything, right?"

"I don't care," He says, getting up and walking out the door, "I'm done."

- - - - -

He's been sitting there, alone, for what feels like hours. Until suddenly, he hears a familiar voice behind him.

"Hi, ■■■■■■■."

He turns around, and he sees him. He frowns, turning back around.

"Go away."

"...."

■■■■■■ walks over to him, before taking a seat next to him. A few minutes of silence passes, before his friend speaks.

"Look. ■■■■■■■. As much as I agree with you, what you want us to do is a big risk. It's.. It's completely against what's written in the prophecy's scripts. It's impossible."

"So you're here to rub it more in my face then? Don't want to hear it. Just piss off and go play fortnite."

"No, that's not why I'm—"

"Then what do you want?"

The boy pauses for a moment, and he hears ruffling sounds.

■■■■■■■ turns to look at him, and he's trying to find something in his pocket. He notices that he isn't wearing his blue bracelet.

A few seconds pass before he pulls out two rings; both of which were radiating a vibrant, white glow. He passes one to him, looking at him with luminescent, aqua blue eyes.

"I'm here to join you."

■■■■■■■ looks down at the ring in his friend's hands. Without thinking, he cups his hands around the ring he passes to him.

The glowing, white ring is cold at first in his hands. But as each second passes, the internal heat from within his body warms the locket, and he watches as his friend puts on his ring.

"The new duo," He smiles at him, holding up his hand, "Us two, versus him. I'll do it; I'll help you with the plan."

■■■■■■■ looks at him in the eye, and for the first time in a while, he gives him a genuine smile. He puts on the ring as he speaks:

"You know what to do."

# ➳ CHAPTER 26: PREPARE TO DIE, NERDSSS!

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***PLAYER NUMBER 10— ALTRIVE***

Ryan pulls out his phone casually, reading the message.

"Huh, someone's within a 1 kilometre radius from us."

He turns around to look at Altrive in the eye, whose still sitting against the wall. His eyes are wide open, not being able to be taken off the dead policeman. His entire body is shaking, and he's biting his tongue to stop his gag reflex.

*How can he act so normal when there's literally a dead body in front of him?!*

Killing Sneeg was way different from this. While it was only a shot in the head, it was nowhere near are gruesome as this. Even though he didn't know the man, he feels a nagging ache in his heart.

He probably had a family and kids. And he just killed himself.

*That was no accident. Something came over him. That was not him, there was no way.*

His arms are trembling, and his throat feels tight.

".. Altrive?" Ryan asks him, bending down to look at his friend face-to-face, "Are you okay?"

He can't talk; Instead, he lifts a feeble arm, pointing at the man with a violently quivering arm.

"Oh, good point. We should get out of here before the other policemen find us and we get framed. C'mon."

He grabs his wrist to pull him up, ignoring his sweaty palm. Altrive manages to stumble up with shaking legs.

"D-D-D... D—Dead.." He stammers out, his fingers clasping even more tightly around his mouth. Ryan tugs his arm, as they stealthily run out from the alleyway.

One of the police guards notice them, and he points at them, yelling to signal the other policemen. The girl from before is also watching this happen, with a shocked expression on her face.

"Hey, where do you boys think you're going?!"

"Crap!" Ryan exclaims, and he sees a motorbike belonging to one of the COPS in the distance. With swift feet, he runs over to the

vehicle, still holding Altrive's wrist. Luckily, the keys are still inserted, and he hops onto it, ushering Altrive to climb on behind him as he ignores the yelling policemen.

"Start, start, start, you stupid piece of—"

He twists the clutch leaver, and suddenly the motorbike kicks into ignition. Altrive wraps his arms around Ryan's waist, squeezing him while the bike accelerates.

He turns a corner of the street, while looking at the rearview mirror — two police cars are trailing them.

"H-H-He's.. D-Dea...Dead," Altrive stammers, "I.. I.. I *can't b— Breathe!"*

"Altrive, calm down!" Ryan snaps, "Everything's fine, alright? Yeah, he's dead, so what? If you don't want to end up like him, then stay alert!"

The police sirens begin to whirr, blasting through the suburbs. Ryan tightens his grip on the handle bars as he accelerates faster.

"There's a gun in my backpack!" Ryan yells to him, "Get it out and shoot them!"

Altrive's mind is spinning, and he feels a wave of nausea upon him.

*A man just killed himself in front of us. How can you act so.. Normal?!*

He closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath.

*Breathe in. 1... 2... 3... Breathe out. 1... 2... 3...*

He loosens his grip a little around his waist, and takes another deep breath before exhaling deeply. He clears his mind as he calms himself down, reminding himself:

*Calm down. You have to calm down, Altrive. Stop being a crybaby. Ryan's a year younger than you and he's got it all under control. You have to stay calm and listen to him so you won't die. Stay calm.*

"Okay," He says after a minute, and he opens his backpack, grabbing one of his pistols. He turns around, and the police cars are still on his trail.

He holds up the pistol and steadies his aim, pulling the trigger. A bullet shoots, piercing through the windows of one of the cars. He shoots again, and the car swerves, crashing into a pole on the sidewalk.

Ryan turns another corner and into a narrow alleyway. And immediately he loses the cars. But to Altrive's disappointment, a motorbike holding two other policemen rides into view.

"Stop right there!" One of them yells through a megaphone, holding out a gun, "Or we'll shoot!"

Ryan doesn't stop, and instead he twists the handle, speeding faster.

"There's a ramp up ahead, I'm going to ride up it!" Ryan yells over the sound of the wind, "When I do, shoot them!"

"Got it."

As they approach the ramp, Altrive readies his grip on the gun. Seconds before the bike hits the beginning of the ramp, Altrive repeatedly pulls the trigger of the pistol. A few of his shots miss, causing the policemen to shoot at them.

One of COPs bullets puncture a tire of the motorbike. Altrive shoots again in retaliation— To his success, it perpetrates right into the chest of the policeman.

Ryan speeds up the tall ramp, and launches off, losing the last of their trail. Altrive holds onto him again as they fly meters up through the air; wind harshly blowing through their faces and hair.

Mid-air, Ryan realises that the motorbike is going to crash into another wall. Thinking quickly, he grabs Altrive's wrist, standing up from the zooming vehicle and jumping off.

As they both land against the concrete floor, a second passes before the vehicle crashes into the wall, causing it to burst in flames.

Altrive blinks, bewildered at how quickly this had happened. Ryan gets up quickly, brushing himself off as he looks down at his now ripped, grazed jeans.

Altrive whips out his phone, predicting that a message related to the injury will appear. It does:

*PLAYER NUMBER 10 WILL GRAZE HIS LEGS AND ELBOWS.*

*INJURY LEVEL: MINORSURVIVAL: 100%YOUR LOWER BODY WILL BE BRUISED.INJURY LEVEL: MINORSURIVAL: 99%*

"No critical injuries?" Ryan queries.

"Nah, just a few scratches," Altrive replies, shoving his phone back in his pocket as he gets back up on his feet.

He and Ryan run a little further ahead, just to keep away from the fire incase an explosion happens.

As they run, Ryan checks his phone. He stops running and frowns anxiously.

"Uh oh. We've accidentally went the wrong way. Now, they're only 50 meters away."

"What?!" Altrive exclaims, "Now where do we go? The motorbike is trashed!"

Ryan's eyes dart back and forth, scanning the city until he comes across a large skyscraper-like building.

"High ground!" He yells, running towards the building as Altrive follows him, "We'll use height to our advantage and try to scout them out!"

The two boys run into the building, rushing inside of an elevator

as they are taken up to the rooftop floor of the tall skyscraper.

Heart racing; adrenaline pumping; clutching a gun, Altrive and Ryan sprint out of the elavator, climbing up one last small set of stairs as they make it to the rooftop of the skyscraper.

The view from up there was amazing — The complex, towering skyline was much different in contrast to the one he had seen yesterday night.

Yesterday when they camped at a rooftop, the skyline's view looked peaceful and tranquil, with small buildings covering the horizon.

Now, at the other side of the city, they were facing against much larger buildings; Like a New York horizon.

Ryan stops a minute to catch his breath too, as he looks out at the astonishing view. Altrive stops too, bending down with his hands on his knees as he pants. His phone buzzes, and Altrive pulls it out. His heart pounds in his chest as he reads what it says:

*PLAYER NUMBER 10 WILL BE INJURED WITHIN 10 MINUTES.*
*INJURY: SEVERE*
*SURVIVAL RATE: 20%*
*WITHIN 20 MINUTES, YOU WILL BE CRITICALLY INJURED.*
*SURVIVAL RATE: 0.1%*
*YOU WILL REACH A DEAD END UNLESS SOMEBODY BREAKS FROM THEIR FUTURE.*

"W—What..?" He blinks, reading the message.

Before he can say anything else, he hears somebody shout from across the buildings. Ryan and Altrive whip around, and a few buildings ahead of them, they see a man standing on the ledge of a taller rooftop, holding up a sword as he yells out.

"PREPARE TO DIE, NERDSSS!"

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***TECHNOBLADE***

Last night, the three had decided to plan out how they would infiltrate and take down numbers 9 and 10.

They eventually settled on a stable enough plan, and fortunately, they had fallen right into their trap.

That night, Technoblade had gotten information that 9 and 10 would travel further into the city. Coincidentally, it was the same area Techno had first killed Poke. With the help of Schlatt's diary, they had been able to figure out the exact time they would show up at the city.

Connor had managed to contact the police earlier today, requesting for them to investigate the alleyway as they told them that the 'victims for Poke's murder would show up at exactly 12 PM'.

From there, they just had to hope that the police would catch 9 and 10 intruding into the restricted area. Technoblade's diary had told him some useful information that 10 knows how to operate a vehicle, so he took that under the presumption that 10 would try using a vehicle to escape the COPS. Fortunately, he did; And from there, all they had to do was to guess and pick a nearby building to execute the final phase of their plan.

They were only a few buildings away, but its was no matter. With the use of parkour and grappling hooks to their advantage, they could easily get to them.

"Hey, what happened to the whole 'attacking them when they least expect it' part?" Schlatt frowns, as he crosses his arms whilst sitting back on his seat.

"I changed my mind on that," Technoblade shrugs, grip tight around the handle of his unsheathed sword.

"Also, dude," Connor adds, tying his jacket around his waist as he pulls out his grappling look. He looks at Techno, with inquiring blue eyes. "Can't we just like, shoot them with our guns?"

"Heh? Just *shoot them?"* He scoffs, baffled at the statement, "That's just *boring.* Where would be the fun in that?*"*

He turns his back towards them, facing 9 and 10, who are standing on the rooftop of a skyscraper a few buildings ahead in the distance.

His unzipped, crimson red jacket flows back in the breeze of the afternoon wind; His locks of hair dancing lightly against the breeze. One foot propped on the ledge of the skyscaper with the other on normal ground level, he holds up his rapier in his left hand.

"PREPARE TO DIE, NERDSSS!" He yells out, holding up his weapon in the air. He clenches his teeth, scowling as his vibrant red eyes dart along the horizon.

*"Initiate the operation,"* He commands at Connor and Schlatt, and he jumps from the edge of the building.

A split second before he launches into the air, he whips out a grappling hook from his pocket, aiming it at the railings of another building as he shoots up, spiderman-style. Swinging up, he arches back as he allows the force of the hook to transport him. Since the other night, he had learned to properly master and accustom to the skill of operating grappling hooks — not that he couldn't before.

The hook coils around the railing to another closer building as he zooms up; as he reaches it, his legs wrap quickly around the railings as he shoots again, this time at the same building 9 and 10 were at.

9 quickly kicks into action, jerking around as he breaks off into a sprint. He runs to the ledge of the rooftop, taking a leap of faith as he parkours on top of another building, with 10 following close

behind.

Techno lifts a hand to his earpiece, speaking into an attached mic. "Where are they heading?"

"Player number 9, Krinios," He hears Schlatt's voice speak into the mic, the quality almost as bad as those cheap walkie talkies you'd buy from the reject store. "He's taking a random route up North, towards a bridge. From the bridge will be your best time to attack! Aim for Altrive, he'll be the weaker one."

Jschlatt has ahold of all three of their diaries; His task was to stay put at the building and guide them using their three combined diaries and a walkie talkie with a high reception range.

"Got ya," Techno responds, and he lands swiftly onto the skyscraper 9 and 10 were once at.

"Careful, Number 10's equipped with a fully functioning handgun," Schlatt's warning echoes statically into his earpiece, and he makes sure to keep that in mind. He breaks off into a sprint, following 9 and 10 as he jumps to the building they're running along on.

"Huh*, where do you think you're going?"* He calls out, a smirk appearing on his face as he catches up to one of the hooded boys. He holds out his sword, pounding the muzzle of the handle against the back of 10's head, sending him tripping over his footing. He turns around, eyes wide in terror as he's facing against the Blood God.

"Ryan!!" He yells out, and he's kneed in the face as he says this; He hears something crack, before feeling a pool of thick liquid run down from his nose. He yells out in pain, throat raw as he stumbles back from the abrupt attack. Without thinking, he pulls out his handgun, aiming it with shaking hands at Techno as he shoots.

Techno ducks the bullet, twisting his body as he grabs him by the hair, yanking him back as he lands another kick at him. Altrive falls back, dropping his gun as he cries out louder.

"Get good," He sneers, watching as 10 crawls up from the concrete ground.

*I haven't even used the sword yet.*

He hears a bang, followed by a bullet travelling what seems like 800 miles per hour right towards him. Like time had slowed, his eyes trail the bullet, and he leans back; It skims past his face, and his eyes dart towards the direction it had came from.

9 is holding a gun in his hands from the other side of the building, and he shoots again at him.

"You didn't tell me he had a gun as well," Techno mutters into the mic, ducking down as he dodges a ray of Krinios' bullets.

10 escapes, staggering quickly to 9.

"Figured you woulda saw that coming," He hears Schlatt reply, before gravely stating, "Altrive is going to die."

"I know that," He says blandly, running to catch up to the two boys as they jump down onto another building — And it emerges clear to him that it was not in fact a building, but rather, a long, narrow..

*Bridge.*

He sprints, leaping off of the building and landing briskly onto the concrete bridge, which stretches out for miles along the rooftops of the skylines.

950 feet in the air.

And there are no railings — Or anything protecting anyone from falling, really. It was the perfect place to fall to your doom.

He does a rushed calculation in his head: They should be around 25 meters ahead of him.

Suddenly, like on cue, Connor comes flying into view with his own hook, landing ahead of 10 and 9 as he holds his grappling gun — They're cornered, now. Both of their exits are blocked.

"For real?" 10 calls out for the first time, even despite his wrecked-up state.

"Yeah for real!" Connor yells back, running as he pounces at Number 9, engaging into a fight.

Techno runs in, swerving as he kicks down Altrive, who's already weakened by his earlier attack. Altrive raises a fist, throwing a helplessly weak punch at Techno. He laughs at this.

"You know you can't win against me, right?"

He kicks him down, stepping onto his chest as he falls with his back on the ground.

His entire face is a mess - Blood covering his forehead; hair matted over his face; tears running down his eyes. He's beyond terrified.

"I-... I know," He heaves, grunting against the force of Techno's shoe on his stomach, "I- I know that, I know I can't."

"Then why?" He spits, "Why are you still trying to fight against me?"

Altrive chokes back on his tears, straining as he tries to escape from Techno.

"Because *I promised myself I would never give up."*

His pleading, green eyes flicker as he says this, and Techno blinks.

Is it right? To kill him?

He lowers his sword.

And mercilessly slits the long, steel blade along his neck.

Altrive splutters, choking as blood pools from his throat and mouth.

*"ALTRIVE!!"* Ryan shrieks, "*NOOOO!"*

Remorselessly, Techno kicks him off the bridge, his attention now turned to the bewildered and horrified Ryan. He charges at him in full speed, and 9 ducks down.

He twists around Technoblade, in an attempt to land a surprise attack at him, but he fails.

Instead he's greeted by a rough hand grabbing at the collar of his hood. He feels something cold and rigid penetrate through his stomach, and he looks down.

A sword.

He doesn't have time to think before Techno shoves the hook of his gun down his shirt, it's metal hooks scraping his bare chest.

"Yeah," He shrugs, "I actually have a rare medical condition that makes me physically incapable of losing. But good job for trying, at least."

Techno tugs on the gun, ripping out the bloodied sword as he pulls the trigger.

In an instant, the zipline shoots out from the gun, sending Ryan flying back as he's attached to the frontal hook of the gun.

Flying back at insane speeds, the line extends at least 300 feet before crashing into a window to another skyscraper building.

Techno lets go of the grappling hook before the line pulls him in, as Schlatt announces again in his earpiece.

"Jump off the bridge, Connor's gonna catch you with his hook and you're going to land. Wait a minute, you also.."

The mic cuts out to static.

*Damn it, the reception's too far.*

But he doesn't waste a second, anyway. He sheathes the sword back in his holster, jumping off from the bridge. As he falls down, Connor grabs him, and he uses his grappling hook to attach to a lower building a couple hundred meters away.

As they fly across the skylines, they reach the rooftop of a lower building— One much more closer to the ground, having a clear view of the suburban streets.

Connor falls down to his knees, panting breathlessly. Techno wipes his forehead, and it doesn't take him long before he catches his breath once again.

He turns around, looking down at the streets.

He sees a figure in a dark hood is standing on the ground near an alleyway, watching Technoblade from below.

He can't see much, but there are two features to the figure that he *can see.*

One being underneath the hood is a pair of brown eyes.
And the other...
*Are light, brown, dog-like ears.*

**// AUTHORS NOTE //**
**aaaaa sorry this chapter is like super long (3k words). I promise I will try to not make too much of these long chapters since I know some people may find long chapters boring? asfhsakjdfjas anyways hope this makes up for my 1.5k word previous chapter :))**

# ➳ CHAPTER 27: until next time

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Travis...?" He murmurs; The word feels odd and almost foreign on his tongue. He hasn't said that name with such inquiry in ages. Much less, held the proper opportunity to *talk* to him. And now was his chance. He had to see him, before the moment slips away.

He must reach Travis.

And then, just as soon as he comes, the figure turns around and runs.

Techno looks back at Connor and opens his mouth to say something, but stops when he sees him double over on his knees and vomit. He winces, and turns his gaze back to the alleyway.

"Stay here, Connor." He pulls out his sword.

He jumps off the structure, clutching onto his weapon as he shoves and digs it into the walls of the building, sliding down as he uses it like a rope — Only that the sword actually dug through the walls.

Once he makes it a few meters above ground, he swings over, taking out the sword as he jumps down. He sheathes it, and breaks off into a sprint toward the alleyway he thought he saw Travis in. He reaches it, and doesn't hesitate to run through it; His chest burning as his heart races; Stamina surprisingly high considering the amount of action he's been through today.

He almost feels bad, for dragging them into this; Connor especially.

*The kid couldn't even hold his stomach together.*

The alleyway cuts a corner, turning left, and he runs through. He reaches his hand to his pocket to pull out his phone— But to his dismay, he remembers that his phone is actually with Schlatt. He curses under his breath.

As he's running, he sees an outline of a shorter person just running around another corner; He speeds up, sliding across the gravel as he turns again.

The alleyway ends, revealing a large, empty, deserted space; It's ground plastered with gravel and concrete, and pieces of logs and other various items scattered everywhere. There are brick walls surrounding the two parallel sides. On the opposite side of Techno,

there's a large arch brick wall, with a run down, wooden double-door. He presumes it's probably either an exit or entrance.

His eyes grow wide as he sees the hooded figure a few meters in front of him, trying desperately to open the doors.

"Hey!" He yells.

The figure whips around; His big, brown eyes have an innocent glimmer in them, with curly, dark brown hair covering his forehead.

*Travis.*

Techno pauses, stopping as he looks at him. For a good minute or so, he's frozen in disbelief — His head muddles inside the consciousness of his mind, spinning with empty thoughts as he's left speechless. Why *was* he here?

Did he really forget *why he was here?*

Finding Travis — Hadn't that been his goal? Looking for him up until now — And now, he's completely forgotten why he wanted to find him. In no way whatsoever would finding him have helped his game.

But he blinks the question out of his mind, because now he's standing in front of him, and he has to make do with this situation.

He breathes out.

"Travis?"

Travis, standing only a few meters away from him, hunched back as he faces him, responds with silence.

"... Technoblade," He murmurs, voice wavering in his throat. He backs away a little, stuttering. "Y-You.. You can't stay here. You have to leave!"

And suddenly, Techno has an itching urge to embrace him. It's a feeling he can't remember overcoming; A feeling foreign to him, and he clutches his chest as he feels his heart ache.

When he thinks about it, he can't really remember feeling anything else *but* the desire to kill.

*What is this feeling?*

But he takes a step forward to Travis. And without even thinking, he runs at him, pulling him into an embrace as he wraps his arms tight around Travis.

He doesn't know why. It was just a feeling in his gut. And often, he didn't like to listen to his gut.

He's helpless to the words that slip out his mouth.

"Travis, I've been looking ever—"

But before he can finish, Travis suddenly yells, forcefully pushing him off as terror washes into his eyes. He stumbles back, falling down to his butt like as if he had just looked at the ugliest thing in the universe.

*... Am I that ugly?*

"N-N-N-N-No!" He stutters, *"D-D-Don't touch me!"*

Techno looks down at his hand, and sees that it's coated with blood.

"Oh, this?" he looks at him, and wipes his hand on his jacket, "No, no, Travis, I'm not going to kill—"

"Y-Your e-eyes," he stammers, *"T-They're, r-r-r-red! Th-They're — Crazy!"*

*... But they've always been red.*

He puts a hand to his eye. His vermillion, pools of crystal swirls deep within the iris of his wine-red eye. His pupils are fixated on Travis, glaring into and shattering his innocent gaze.

He frowns, and takes a step closer. "Tra—?"

"AH-AHHHHH!" He shrieks, backing away, "GET AW-A-AWAY FROM ME! GETAWAYFROMME, GETAWAYFROMME *GETAWAYFROMMEGETAWAYFROMME!!"*

His screams paralyse him, and he stops, filled with distress as he can't take his sight away from Travis; Pure horror sprawled across his face — his eyes pinned wide open in sheer fright. He's never truly seen him so... *scared.*

*Why is he afraid of me?*

"You heard him. Step away from the kid."

He turns around, and sees a man standing a few meters behind him, folding his arms. His face is covered with a threatening mask, and he's wearing a belt with a few holsters.

"Joko," He seethes, narrowing his eyes, shooting him a spiteful glare.

"Hey, it's not nice to scare people like that," Joko says, walking over to Travis as he helps him up, wrapping an arm around him. He accusingly points to Techno with the other, narrowing his eyes.

"I know what you're trying to do. You're aiming to take him out just because he's weak, aren't you?"

He feels the back of his head start to throb painfully; He's overcome with a feeling of uncertainty, like as if his brain was flipping upside down. Again, he finds himself blurting out words that he doesn't even *think* of saying:

*"What?* No! That's not it! I- I saw him running so I ran after him to talk to him. Why would I want to kill him?!"

He covers his mouth quickly.

*Why did I say that? That's not what I want to say.*

It's like a whole new side of him is thinking for him — No, a new *person.*

"Just like how you didn't mean to kill Cooper?" Travis shoots back, catching him off guard by the sudden outburst. Admittedly,

he's slightly taken aback.
"And y-your hands.. T-They have... *blood* on them..! *What have you done to him?!"*

*Him?*
He assumes that by that, Travis must mean 9 and 10.

*I killed him. What else would I have done? Spill ketchup on my hands?*

As he's about to speak, his pulsing headache returns. He harshly presses his hard against his forehead to try ease the pain, grinding his teeth. His eyes race in different directions, and an overwhelming, sharp pain surges through his head; like a line of voltage searing through and overloading it's electrical circuit.

Joko takes a step forward, releasing Travis.
"I think we're getting off at the wrong foot," He closes his eyes, holding out both his hands, "How about let's just re-do this whole introduction again, yeah?"

Joko clears his throat, and finger guns him.

"Yo, Technoblade. It's me, Joko. Glad to see you again."

And then all at once, his migraine stops.
He looks at Joko, and a sinister smile curves along his face.

"I'd watch what goes out your mouth, Joko," He grins at him beneath the shadow arching over his eyes, "The only thing you should be glad of is not being dead yet."

His hand wraps around the handle of his sword, pulling it out.

"*I'm going to kill you."*

Before Joko has the chance to respond, Technoblade charges at him. Without hesitation, he holds his sword up, swinging it at his head.

"Woah," Joko comments, swiftly ducking down as he lands a kick at Techno's legs, "When did you suddenly get a high ego?"

Quick to think, Techno jumps up a split second before he's hit, somersaulting into the air as he lands behind Joko.

"Probably about the same time you grew the balls to fight me," He jests, throwing his elbow to pound the back of Joko's neck. Succeeding, Joko grunts as he lurches forward by the force, before jerking around fast; He moves his head left to avoid his head being sliced open into its demise. Techno slashes again as his face, missing by only a hair as he's suddenly kneed in the stomach. He coughs out saliva, only to realise that the saliva is painted a crimson red.

He furrows his eyebrows, glaring at him with passionate hatred as he kicks Joko down in the stomach. Joko falls back, and his face

is about to be greeted by the slice of his sword when he quickly pulls out a knife from his leather holster.

With two hands, he clutches onto the knife as it clashes against Techno's sword — Both using brute force, their strength is equal as they counter each other. Strained, Joko furrows his eyebrows, ruffled hair sticking to his sweaty, creased forehead; Techno's stare is hard, not flinching.

Joko pivots his arm, breaking the collision of their metal weapons as he jabs the knife upwards. It scrapes the surface of his chest, allowing him to jump free from his grasp. With full force, Joko swings the knife at Technoblade's side. Techno ducks, moving to the side as he hits Joko's legs with his blade. He yells out in pain, before raising his fist to catapult a punch — That is, until, Techno grabs hold of his wrist, only inches away from hitting the centre of his face. Palms enclosed around Joko's, he twists his arm. Joko grinds his teeth together in an attempt to prevent another yell; He kicks him briskly in the groin, slashing the tip of his dagger along Techno's forehead.

The exchange of slashes, punches, and kicks go on for a while — Both of the boys attacks almost matching against one another, while Travis watches mesmerised from the sidelines.

Fleet-footed, Techno dodges a swing of the knife as he slices Joko's shoulder. In retaliation, Joko propels a kick at his side.

*So this is what a fight between the two top players is like?*

He stumbles to the floor, crouching as he lands on both feet. He bites his tongue, clutching his sword tighter in his hands as he growls.

*Why can't this nerd just die already? This is a scam!*

He launches forward at Joko, using every bit of his strength to lash. He swings left, then right, then left, and then in the centre — Until Joko is propped up against the brick wall with a sword only an inch away from wedging his neck.

*"Travis!"* He exclaims, fear flickering through his eyes as Techno leans in closer to his face, *"Help me!"*

"You think he's gonna help you?" He smiles, "It's useless. He's too *afraid*."

Despite the tip of the rapier's blade skimming the surface of his throat, Joko cracks a sly grin, regaining his confidence.

"I think you're forgetting something, bud," He says, eyeing Travis from the corner of his sight, "*You're the ticket out of here."*

He's left confused for a minute, before suddenly remembering.

*Oh yeah, I'm the Bounty.*

And to his surprise, Joko turns his head, yelling at Travis.

"Travis!" He shouts at him, "If you kill him, you'll be able to leave

the game, *remember?!* You'll be free! *You'll be free from this game of death!* Isn't that what you want?"

Travis looks at him, his hood falling from his face as his pure, golden brown eyes look at him in the face.

It strikes him as odd, how Joko doesn't seem to be willing on being set free.

Why is he giving away his *freedom* for Travis?

"Now is your chance, Travis! *Do it. Do it now and set yourself free!"*

Joko throws the knife over to Travis, and Techno watches aghast as a glimmer of remorse twinkles in his iris, eyelids fluttering before swallowing hard. Travis shuts his eyes, clutching the knife in his shaking hands.

And before Technoblade has time to think, he's stabbed in the shoulder.

An exasperated howl escapes from his throat, as he lunges back, holding onto his shoulder. His eyes dart from Joko to Travis, and he sees that his face is completely blank. As he holds the knife, he swings again. His movements are much slower in contrast to Joko, and he manages to dodge him easily.

But Travis' expression is completely different to what he has seen before; And suddenly, he's reminded of the time back at the bridge, when Travis had the same, blank look on his face as he watched Joko threaten Carson.

Joko swerves a punch to Techno's face, before ducking quickly.

Techno's grip on his sword tightens, aiming it to Travis' neck.

He lifts it up, and —

*"Hey Technoblade!* This is the fifth-fucking-time I've said this, if you can't hear me then I will *literally* suck Connor's balls."

He stops, lowering his sword, apace as he backs away. Blinking, he immediately recognises the voice. His hand shoots up to his earpiece, and he turns it on.

"Schlatt?" He queries, dodging a robotic attack from Travis. Blocking all other sounds from his mind, his attention focuses on Schlatt's voice.

"Oh thank *fuck!"* He exclaims, as Techno jumps back from another attack of Joko, "Where the hell are you?! Wait, you didn't hear that last part right?"

"What do you want?" Techno hisses, "I'm kinda in the middle of killing some dudes."

"I really cannot believe this right now. I cannot believe this, Technoblade. Technoblade, you have to fucking get over here right

the fuck now dude. You have to get here *right now!!"*

"What're you doing?" Joko snaps, and Technoblade runs back from the boys as he yells into his mic:

"Schlatt, I can't! *I need to get more kills!"*

"Fuck your kills! This isn't fucking minecraft dude! *You NEED to get over here now!!"*

Static fills his field of hearing for a moment, and Techno runs back from Travis and Joko.

"Fuck fuck fuck, dude," Schlatt finally speaks again, *"You gotta get here now.* I don't know where the fuck you ran off to, but *you have right now.* Connor's fucking pissing and shitting his pants right now and I'm put in a very complicated situation right now. This is not good. *Get over here."*

"But—"

*"Shut the fuck up and get over to the building you were at before."*

It goes quiet, and Techno is left back facing against reality once again. Quickly, he sprints over to a stack of logs.

"Where are you going?" Joko calls out, and Travis stops running.

"I got somewhere I need to go," Technoblade mutters, "You're lucky, this time. If I really tryharded this, you'd both be dead."

He turns around, and sheaths his sword back as the wind blows against him.

"Until next time," He hisses, and he jumps off the brick wall.

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"Wait, *what?"*

Techno's jaw drops at what Schlatt had just said. Schlatt folds his arms, leaning back against the wall. Connor's sitting down a few feet away from them, holding his phone in both hands.

"Yeah," Schlatt sighs, "I didn't think he'd survive an injury that bad. Kid must have some serious pain tolerance."

"You're telling me after stabbing him in the chest and being flown 300 feet into a building, he's *alive?"*

Schlatt throws his phone in the air, and catches it with his other hand, before pulling up the messages.

***USER 10'S** NECK HAS BEEN SLIT BY **USER 1***
***USER 10** HAS REACHED A **DEAD END***

"See? 9's not on there."

Taking a good look at the screen, he gasps. He's right — He can't see 9's name *anywhere.*

*This doesn't make sense. How..?*

"So now what?" Connor speaks up, "What do we do now?"

Techno pauses, musing for a moment before turning his gaze over

at Connor.

"With an injury as critical as his, he'll probably bleed out within 10 minutes unless taken to the hospital. He's going to die sometime soon. I wouldn't bother scouting out the building just to kill him."

He swears he can hear Connor mumble "good" under his breath.

But... Connor has a point.

*What **do** we do now?*

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**???**

"Just killed a woman, feelin' good!"

"Tommy!" He yells into his headphone's mic, "That was *ME* you just killed!"

"Yeah, that's the point!" His friend responds.

He laughs, leaning in close to his computer screen as he respawns in his Minecraft world.

"Wait," He exclaims, entering his Minecraft house, "What hell did you do to my room?!"

His entire room is griefed, and he can only assume it was Tommy who did it. His friend bursts into fits of laughter in his mic, before returning to his neutral British accent:

"I am sorry, Ty, but you must understand that this is for sophisticated business purposes. Also, you have no right to say anything because you don't have a [YOUTUBE] rank on Hypixel."

Before he can respond to his friend's remark, he suddenly hears a loud *CRASH,* followed by the ear-piercing noise of glass shattering.

He jolts around from his PC, and his eyes grow wide in terror as he sees a man fly dead into the windows to his bedroom.

He lands with a heavy THUD onto his carpet, broken glass surrounding him as blood pours out from his chest. He's wearing a dark blue hood, covered with maroon blood; and his raven black hair is a matted mess.

His jaw drops as his sight is fixated on this man, completely speechless.

*... What the hell did he do to my room?!*

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# ➳ CHAPTER 28: I am ty.

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***TY***

He blinks, standing up slowly as his headset falls from his head. For a full minute, he's left entirely speechless, thoughts running wildly in his head.

"... Hey, Ty? You there?"

He can hear Tommy ask through the mic, but he doesn't answer.

*There is a dead guy in my room. There is actually a dead guy in my room. Is that... A dead guy in my room? Why is there a dead guy in my room?!*

His hand clutches his chest, and the longer he stares, the more he feels his breathing pick up. Hesitantly, he sluggishly moves toward the still boy to take a closer look.

"Uh... Are you.. Okay?" He awkwardly asks, looming over the fallen man. He yelps, jumping back as he sees how bloody his face is.

He looks to be only a year or so older than him, and his entire face is bruised. He's wearing an eyepatch, and his chest is bleeding out, causing his carpet to stain a damp red.

He panics, and quickly runs over to his closet, grabbing a spare towel as he chucks it over the boy. Kneeling down, he lifts up the cold body and wraps the towel around his stomach to try and stop the flow of blood.

"Oh no, uh, uh, stop bleeding," He stutters anxiously, and the first thing that comes to mind is to take him to a hospital.

Lucky for him, his parents are able to afford a home at a luxury apartment in a Skyscraper. Just a few floors below him should be a hospital — He can take him there.

He doesn't wait a minute before heaving up the boy's body, wrapping his arm around him as he tries to help him stand. But he's heavy, and this causes him to stumble back to the floor.

"Argh, *c'mon, c'mon, c'mon,"* He mutters to himself, straining as he struggles to lift him back up again.

The boy is completely unconscious, unable to stand — Much less, even *speak.*

He re-adjusts his hold on the boy, throwing him over his back as he holds both his wrists in his hands. He walks over to his bedroom

door, pulling it open and peeking his head out in the hallway, making sure his parents don't see him.

After all, he couldn't *possibly* imagine the reaction his mom would have after seeing him carry a random dude's bleeding-out body on his back.

As fast as he can, he makes his way over to the exit door of the apartment.

"Ty, where are you going?" His mom calls out from the kitchen.

*Dang it, she must have heard my footsteps.*

"Uhh, I'm just gonna go see Tommy," Ty lies.

".. Alright, just be back before dinner, okay? It'll be ready in an hour!"

"Yeah, I will. Love you mom!"

"Love you too, hun!"

And he slams shut the door as he runs out into the hallway of the building, all the while carrying a boy's bloody body over his back.

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"Help! *Help!"*

He bursts through the doors of the hospital, panting as he lurches forward. Immediately, a group of nurses rush over to him, asking him a bunch of questions.

"U-Uh," He stutters, "He fell through my window like this already, and, uh, I don't know if he's dead. Please help, if you can do anything to save him I—"

"Can you all pretty-please calm down?"

He's interjected by a man, weaving his way through the crowd of nurses. He's wearing a long, white coat, and plastic gloves. His hair is brown, and his eyes are a glimmering shade of jade green, with a pair of glasses over the bridge of his nose.

All the other nurses obey, and the atmosphere calms down a bit. One of the nurses rush in with a wheeled stretcher, and the Doctor helps carry him onto the bed.

"Hey, can you follow me?" He asks Ty, gesturing him to follow. The boy nods, and the Doctor alongside a nurse wheels the unconscious boy into a room.

The Doctor closes the door behind him, and he re-adjusts his glasses, ushering Ty to take a seat. He takes a good look at the body, observing carefully; He takes off the towel wrapped around the boy, and asks the nurse next to him to get some bandages. Quickly, he wraps and seals it around the stomach's stab wound, applying pressure so that no more blood will seep out.

"It's a deep wound — He's in extremely critical condition, you know that, right?" He turns to look at Ty, whose sitting uncomfortably in his seat as he nods. "I'm surprised he's still

breathing. Wrapping the towel around his wound had kept in a crucial amount of blood, he would have died if you didn't do that. You should be proud of thinking that fast!"

"I don't know if 'proud' is the right word," He scratches the back of his neck nervously, "I just did what I thought of in the moment."

"Would you mind telling me what happened, if that's okay with you?" The Doctor asks, as he takes off the unconscious boy's hood so the Nurse can wrap the bandages.

"Well, it's kinda a weird story, actually," He shrugs, "I was just in my room playing video games when all of a sudden, he just crashed through my window with blood all over his chest. The first thing I did was take him here..."

His voice trails off as the Doctor picks something in his hand. It looks to be like some sort of grappling hook, and it's hook is covered with a light layer of blood.

"This was under his hood," The Doctor muses, "Do you have any idea on what had happened?"

Ty shakes his head, and the Doctor starts to examine the body again. A few minutes pass of silence before Ty speaks up again.

"Do you think he'll be okay?"

The Doctor looks at him. "I'm sure with enough treatment, he'll live. He'll have to be here for a couple of days though, otherwise he won't be fully recovered."

He smiles at him, his emerald eyes shimmering with a warm radiant, before turning his attention back to the boy. He whispers something to the nurse, and she nods, collecting a ventilator and some tubes as she assists the boy.

The Doctor bends down in front of the boy sitting at the seat, speaking gently. "What is your name?"

"Ty," He responds.

"Well hello Ty," The Doctor smiles, "You can me Dr. Halo. We'll be able to sort this out now!~ He's going to be out for a little while, so if you want to you can return home."

He looks at the name tag on Dr. Halo's coat — In bold letters, the words *'DR DARRYL HALO'* are printed in capitals.

Ty nods again, getting up from his seat. "Thanks, Dr. Halo."

He waves at him, making his way to the exit.

"You saved a life, Ty," He calls out to him before he leaves, "That's a good thing. Be proud!"

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***PLAYER NUMBER 9 — RYAN***

Everything is white.

His eye flutters open, and he finds himself staring up at a pure white ceiling; his vision is blinded with bright lights, and it takes him a minute before his sight adjusts to the light. A harsh, thumping sensation pounds at the back of his head, and he tries to lift up his hand to his forehead — Until he realises that he can't.

He literally can't move his arm.

A groan escapes from his mouth as he sits himself up on his bed.

"About time," deadpans a voice. He turns his head, and sees a smaller, olive-skin boy wearing a pink hood sitting on a chair beside him. His white head tie dangles as his head hangs low, concentrating on a game he's playing on his iPad; black, large headphones are covering his ears as he plays.

"Also, your left arm numb so that's probably why you can't move it," The boy adds without averting his focus off his device. Ryan blinks, looking down at his arm which lay lifeless against the sheets. Fortunately, his right arm does work.

His attention returns back to the boy, who's busy playing on his iPad beside him. Suddenly, he lets out an exclaiming yelp, almost throwing his device on the floor.

"What are you playing?" Ryan croaks, curious to see what had made him so terrified. The boy takes off his headphones, and scoots his seat closer to him.

He shows him the screen as he looks at him. "Oh, it's just this horror game called 'Five Nights at Freddy's. Here, have a go."

"Uh—," he stutters, as the boy hands him the iPad and climbs onto the bed next to him, "I don't do well with horror games. Like.. *At all—"*

"Aw c'mon dude, trust me it's fun! I'll guide you through it!"

And before he can even realise what's going on, Ryan finds himself playing video games with one hand, as his new friend watches, leaning into his shoulder.

"Don't get too scared," He reassures him, stopping Ryan from panicking even more, "Biggest thing about this game is that you don't know what's gonna happen, right? You don't know when they're gonna jump out and scare you, *right*? As long as you keep checking those doors and cameras, you're set for the night. Also, can you press Freddy's nose?"

He taps on the poster, and there's a honk. "Yeah, I did. Is something meant to happen?"

"Nah, it just makes me so happy!"

He smiles, before quickly panicking again.

"Oh god, oh fuck, oh *fuck! What the fuck is that sound?!*" He suddenly exclaims, tapping the screen aggressively. The boy starts screaming,

too.

"I don't know, I don't know! *I never heard that before!"*

The two boys start yelling, watching as Ryan struggles to play the game; a few seconds pass before they complete the night, and they stop panicking before exclaiming:

"We win these!" the other boy throws his fist into the air, jumping off the bed as the two burst into laughter.

"This is a baby game!" Ryan chuckles, delight filling his insides as he turns to the boy, "Hey, what's your name?"

The boy stops smiling, and he sits back down in his seat. "You mean you can't remember my name?"

Ryan blinks blankly, and the boy sighs. "Oh yeah, you must have forgotten after passing out."

"Passing out?"

He nods. "A few days ago, you woke up for like 30 seconds. I was like 'Hey, my name's Ty!', and you were like 'I'm Ryan. Can I have water?', so I went up to get you some water and I come back a few seconds later and you were asleep."

*So his name is Ty.*

Ty pauses to a breath. "Then next day, I came again and you woke up. I tried talking to you but you seemed kinda bored and you weren't paying attention, and then you sorta just dropped dead again. From there you didn't wake 'til now. But it's been 5 days, and you haven't passed out for 10 minutes which is good. Wait, are you gonna pass out again Ryan—?"

"It's been *5 days?!"* Ryan cries out, as he feels his heart drop to his stomach. The realisation of not knowing where he is then strikes him, and his eyes dart alarmingly around the room. Now that he's really paying attention, the question hits him:

"*W-Where am I?!* What is this place? *Who a-are you?!"*

"Chill, chill!" Ty waves his arms at him, "It's been 5 days. You're in the hospital, and uh, I'm Ty... Wait, you *do* remember crashing into my room, right..?

He opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. Ty pauses. "Oh yeah," He face palms, "you were unconscious. Well, uh, do you at have the slightest clue what happened to you? Because I don't."

Ryan closes his eyes as he tries to regain his memories; for a few moments, his entire head is empty, leaving behind no recollection of *anything.* But as he digs deeper into his mind's consciousness, small pieces begin to fade into vision.

*Mirai SMP.*

*Escaping from COPS on a motorbike.*

*Fighting Technoblade and Connor on a skyscraper.*

*Running along a bridge.*

*Altrive dy...*

His bloodshot eye flutters open in an instant; throat choking up as *the* memory replays vividly in the back of his head.

*"Altrive,"* he murmurs, recalling the name before yelling out, "Altrive! *Altrive!! W-Where's Altrive!?"* He grabs Ty's shoulders, shaking him with a dolorous craze in his eye. "He's here, right? He's alive, *right?!* Ty! *Where the fuck is Altrive?!"*

"I- I don't know man!" He stutters back, "I don't even know who he—"

"*Yes you do!!* Where is he!? If I'm here, he must be here too! *Altrive has to be here! Tell me where he fucking is!"*

"I swear I have no idea who he is!" He cries, "A-All I know is that I saw you come flying and crashing into my room with your stomach almost practically bleeding out, and I took you to the hospital! D-Dr. Halo said I was allowed to check up on you any time I wanted, so for 5 days I kept coming here waiting for you to wake up! T-That's all I know, *I promise!!* Please don't hurt me!"

His terror-struck, frightened cinnamon eyes prick with small, forming tears, stopping Ryan as his blood runs cold under his flesh. His grip releases from Ty, and he's silent for a minute, taken aback by his own outburst. He sinks back in his bed, looking down.

A delicate silence hangs for a while in the air, until Ryan shatters the ghost-dead quiet.

"Thanks for saving me, Ty," He mumbles, beginning to crawl off, "But... I have to go. You can't be with me any longer, it's not safe."

"Wait, stop!" Ty pulls him back, "You still need to rest!"

"I'm fine," Ryan says, pushing himself off the bed.

"Uh, no, wait! Can you at least *tell me* what happened?"

"It's a long story, man."

And suddenly, Ty runs in front of him, holding his hand out to block him.

"5 days!" He snaps at him out of the blue, "I've waited *5 fucking days for you to wake up dude!* It took hours to clean up your blood off my carpet! And I had to make up a shitty excuse to my mom for the window *YOU* broke — Do you even *know* how much trouble I'm in?"

Ty furrows his eyebrows, and Ryan thinks about this for a moment before sighing.

"Alright then. But you have to believe me, okay?"

And so he tells him everything. From the moment he was sent to God and the game began, to how his diary worked, to the times he spent first meeting Altrive — Killing Sneeg, witnessing the policeman's suicide, escaping the COPS, and finally; the fight with Technoblade, leading to his friends death. Throughout the entire

story, Ty had sat there with an awestruck, jaw-dropped expression.

"So that's why you can't be with me," Ryan finishes, "He's going to track me down at one point or another, and when he does, Technoblade won't hesitate to kill you if it means killing me."

Ty sits there, utter disbelief and shock sprawled across his entire face — He's speechless. But that's understandable. He would be, too.

And finally, Ty blinks, falling back into reality — He manages to must up the nerve to speak, and what he says almost makes Ryan want to pass out again.

*"Let me help you."*

"What?" He utters, "Are you insane?! You're not even part of the game! That's a death wish!"

"You said your phone tells you what's gonna happen within a certain radius, right? So you're gonna stay with me for a few days until you're fully healed. I mean, it's been 5 days already and nothing happened. Even if Technoblade *is* hunting you, he'd have to check every single door in this Skyscraper. By then, we would have found out, and that'd buy us enough time to escape."

"You're saying that as if you're planning on coming *with* me if he does!"

"Yeah, I know."

He shakes his head. "No, I can't let you do that, Ty."

But before he can say anything else, Ty snatches his wrist, pulling him off from the bed.

"Well I am. C'mon!" He calls, making his way over to the room's exit as he drags him.

"B-But your mom—?"

"It's fine, I'll be able to hide you in my room for a couple of days. But if you wanna piss, you're probably gonna have to hold it in until it's midnight. Or, just do it out the window. It's broken, anyway."

Ty pushes open the door, sprinting out and escaping through the hospital's hallway, holding Ryan's hand as he runs by his side. A burning pain hammers in the groin of his stomach as he charges down the hospital's corridor, but nevertheless it doesn't stop him from running.

He doesn't know *why* he's listening to Ty — He's only known him for a couple of minutes.

How does he know if he's able to *trust* him? Much less, how does Ty know he can trust *himself?*

The two boys run past a bunch of nurses and doctors, all giving them the same perplexed look. As Ty leads him to the exit door of the Hospital, he kicks it open.

Ty swears he can see Dr. Halo staring at him from the corner of his eye on the other side of the hospital.

But when he turns around to see him, there's no-one there.

# ➳ CHAPTER 29: see you tomorrow morning

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***TY***

"You like spaghetti?"

He shuts the door behind him, locking it as he walks into his room. Ryan's sitting on his bed, his shirt lifted up as he's observing his bandaged stomach. He swings his head around as he hears Ty's voice, and quickly sits up.

"I like anything," He replies, holding out his arms as Ty gives him the bowl of pasta, "Thanks so much. You really don't have to do this, man."

"I know, but I want to," Ty gives him a grin, shrugging before jumping onto the beanbag beside his small TV as he pulls out a chocolate bar from his pocket.

"You aren't eating dinner?" Ryan asks him through mouthfuls of pasta.

"Not hungry." He shakes his head, taking a bite of his snickers bar. "Anyways, Ryan. I got *a lot* of questions to ask you. I'm still kinda shocked about it all, if I'm being honest. I mean, *God did this?* I never thought I'd be saying this, but God is kinda an asshole."

"Tell me about it. But as much as I wish it weren't, it's all real. And I've had a good, *fucking* taste of it."

Ty sighs, a small glint of pity flickering over his eyes. "If you don't mind me asking... How was he like?"

Ryan knows immediately who he's talking about. He manages to crack a sad smile as he remembers all the cherished moments he had spent with his friend before he reached the end of his fate.

"He was a great guy," he says softly, "even with all that had been going on, he always managed to smile through it all. I don't think I could *ever* bring myself to do that."

He closes his eye. "He had more hope than I ever had. I could have saved him... But I didn't. And because me, I took that hope away from his hands and he died. I robbed him from his future. I robbed him from his *freedom."*

Ty stops chewing on his snack, and swallows as Ryan falls quiet, looking down as he picks at his food. He blinks, and a long minute passes before Ty murmurs benignly.

"My definition of hope is something that's worth driving you

forward."

The words fall benevolently from his lips as he speaks; his tone lowering as he puts his hands in his lap. "I don't think Altrive's hope was driven to win, or to survive... I think his hope came from what he believed in. Like his morals.

" I promised myself I'd never give up' — You told me those were his last words, right? I'm not much of an analyst, but from what I got from that... I think it makes it clear that his hope came from somewhere deeper than just logic. *It came from his heart."*

He holds a hand to his chest. "Hope isn't something you're meant to believe to get what you want. Hope is a feeling that comes from what you believe in. I think when he died... If anything, he had felt *relieved*."

Ryan's left speechless.

He mumbles as he returns his sight to Ty. "... *Wow."*

"Huh," Ty shrugs, almost unable to believe what he had just said, "I never gave a pep talk before. That's cool. Uh, wanna change the subject?"

Ryan only manages to nod slowly; Ty chucks the rest of his wrapper into the bin beside the TV.

"Why are you even helping me, anyway?" Ryan eventually says, "I'm a *murderer*. I killed someone dude. I'm a bad person."

"Hey, killing someone doesn't make you a bad person."

There's a silence, before Ty gasps slowly. "Oh... Yeah, okay, maybe killing someone *does* make you a bad person. But you weren't given any other choice, right? I mean, I woulda done the same."

"That's the problem," Ryan starts, "I mean, *I killed someone,* and I didn't even feel a shred of remorse for the guy. Who in their right mind would *shoot* someone without feeling guilty?"

"Well at least you got a superpower now. You know, with the catchphrase thing."

Ty then gasps. "Wait, you still didn't tell me what your catchphrase was!"

"I didn't?" Ryan blinks, and he puts down the empty bowl as he takes out his phone, "Oh, well here it is."

Ty runs over to him and leans in to see the screen; In bold letters, the words blink:

***YOUR CATCHPHRASE:***

***" HAVE A KRINIOS DAY! "***

"Last time I said this was like, *years* ago as a kid," Ryan frowns. "But guess it's a thing again now."

"So if you say it, you'll get a special power? What kind of power?"

"I don't know, it doesn't say."

"Would I get your power if I say it?"

"Don't you *dare,"* He snaps, and Ty chuckles. He smirks, rolling his eyes.

"Hey God," Ryan asks sarcastically, "Can Ty say my catchphrase without getting my power?"

A buzz alerts on his phone as soon as he says this.

*NO. A PERSON OUTSIDE THE GAME CANNOT OBTAIN THE CATCHPHRASE'S ABILITY.*
*THE CATCHPHRASE ONLY APPLIES TO THOSE COMPETING INSIDE THE GAME.*

Ty's jaw drops; and Ryan stutters.
"Oh my god," Is all he says.

*DON'T SAY MY NAME IN VAIN IDIOT.*

"You never told me you could text God!" Ty exclaims, looking over at Ryan.

"I.. Didn't know that, either."

"Hey God!" Ty yells at the phone, "Suck my fucking dick, bitch."

Immediately, there's a reply.

*NO THANKS. YOU'RE UNDERAGE.*

"You're admitting you would if he wasn't?" Ryan yells back jokingly, "Kinda gay."

*SHUT UP.*

Ty and Ryan turn to look at each other for a minute, before bursting into laughter. A phone rings from the otherside of the room, and Ty quiets down. He gets up and runs over to it, grabbing the phone as he holds it to his ear, shushing Ryan.

"Yo?" He asks.
" 'Sup," A voice speaks.
"Tommy, it's midnight."
"Yeah Ty, it's midnight. Why are you on your phone at midnight?"

He rolls his eyes. "What is it?"

"Hear me out. Just listen. You really expect me to sleep after telling me today that a body crashed into your room, Ty?"

*Oh yeah.*

The day he took Ryan to the hospital, Ty had forgotten that he didn't mute the call he had with Tommy. Once he had come back, he received a spam of message from Tommy.

"Don't worry, the guy who crashed into my room with a grappling hook is fi—"

"Wait, grappling hook?"

Ty nods, even though Tommy can't see him, and he lowers his voice. "His name's Ryan. I found out that some guy shot him across

the skyscrapers and into my window with a grappling hook. I'll tell you the rest later, okay?"

There's a small silence.

"... Do you remember the hook's brand?"

It was an odd question that he didn't see coming. He puts a finger to his chin, musing as he tries to recollect his memory of it.

Yeah, he does remember. Very vaguely, but the letters were printed in a lining too fine to ignore.

*"4-Claw Zip 72."*

There's another small pause, and then Tommy speaks again. "Thanks. I'll talk to you tomorrow, then. Y'know, when it's *not* midnight."

He hangs up, and Ty turns around to look at Ryan.

"Uh, don't worry," He reassures, putting down his phone. "Just a friend."

Ty coughs, changing the topic quickly. "We should probably go to bed, huh? Get some rest?"

"Fine by me," Ryan shrugs. Ty takes the empty bowl from Ryan, running out to set it onto the kitchen counter. He returns, and pulls out a spare mattress from under his bed, dragging it to the other side of the room. Ryan gets up and helps him set up the bed, and once they finish Ty claps.

"You can sleep here for a few nights," he offers, jumping onto his own bed. Ryan smiles at him.

"Thanks. I really appreciate it."

"No problem," He grins back, before switching off the light.

Hours pass as Ryan lays tirelessly in Ty's makeshift mattress.

Then, it all comes back to him; like the numbness of his denial over his friend's death as worn off, it floods out, collapsing as a whole over what was left of his aching heart. Tears stream down from his eyes as he clasps his hand over his mouth, unable to stop the soft sobs and whimpers from slipping out his throat.

He's dead.

Altrive really *is dead*.

✧ ✖ ✧

***NUMBER 15 — JSCHLATT***

He hears Techno let out an agonising groan from the amidst the bushes, breaking the content quietness of the cackling fire between him and Connor. Connor lifts up his head, eyeballing the arch of bushes which are a couple meters ahead.

"You think we should help him?" Connor asks.

"He said he wanted to do it himself," Schlatt mutters, leaning a head in his palm.

"I don't know, it's pretty bad. He's covered in scratches and that stab in his shoulder is kinda deep."

Techno lets out another howl as he applies more antiseptic medicine to his wounds. Connor's eyes grow wide, and he stands up.

"I'm gonna help hi—"

"Wait."

He grabs his hand, halting Connor from walking. He turns to him, and Schlatt can see the reflection of the campfire dazzle and reflect in his cobalt eyes.

"I want to talk to you about something," Schlatt blurts out, making Connor sit back down, waiting intently. Schlatt clears his throat, rolling up his sleeves of his jacket. His brown hair falls over his face as he looks down at the fire, being filled with a sense of deja-vu.

"I know you noticed him too," He says.

Connor raises an eyebrow, and leans forward. "Noticed.. Who?"

"Technoblade, who the fuck else would I be talking about? He's been acting weird ever since the night we betrayed Joko. It's like... *He's a whole new person.*"

Connor nods slowly.

"The Technoblade we knew before..." he murmurs, "he would *never* kill someone."

Furrowing his eyebrows, Schlatt pinches the bridge of his nose. "I just can't believe how *easily* I let myself agree to his plan. *I'm* supposed to be the leader, because I'm the only one here who knows how to get sales in stocks. But I gambled too hard on *this* deal."

"Schlatt," Connor says in a low voice, "I've been having this sneaking suspicion for a while now. I think that night, when he blacked out — I think he met God again. But on his *own.* If he did, he may have done something to him."

Schlatt lifts his gaze up at Connor's sincere and anxious eyes, and the horrid realisation of what he's thinking dawns on him.

"You're saying he's being controlled?"

"I don't know, maybe. I just... I don't know how much longer it's gonna be before..."

He hears himself gulp. "Before what...?"

"*... Before we'll end up like 10."*

There's an eerie and uncomforting silence between them, and Schlatt laughs nervously.

"The fuck? No, he wouldn't do that. Connor, if he really *was* being

controlled, we'd be dead already. He's just taking this game more seriously than us now, which is a good thing. Besides, we're sitting in the best position in this game."

He was more so trying to convince *himself* that, though.

"I guess," Connor shrugs, "We have the most numbers too. We're a team of three, Joko and Travis are a duo, and the rest are solo. If we play our cards right, we could be the final three."

*Final three.*

It was an idea that had always been at the back of his mind, but what would happen *after* that was completely foreign to his mind.

"What would we do next if that really *did* happen?" He considers wearily. Connor clears his throat, exhaling.

"I thought about that for a while, and.. I think our best option would be *russian roulette."*

His pride drops to the pit of his stomach.

That was the *last thing* he had expected to come out of Connor's mouth.

"We'll load a gun with one bullet in 5 chambers," He continues, "And we could each take turns in pulling the t—"

**"Fuck you, *Connor!"***

He jumps back a little at Schlatt's outburst.

"We're *not* fucking doing that, okay?!" He snaps, "That's out of the *fucking question!* What do you think we are? There's no way I'm that fucking stupid*!"*

He stands up, walking over to jab a finger at him. "Why would you let literal chance have the power to throw your life away? That's the stupidest shit that has come out of your mouth, Connor. And you said a lot of stupid shit. Do you not value your *life?* Or is killing yourself your top priority? Don't you have a reason to win? To become *God?!"*

"W-Well, yeah." He stumbles on his words, unsure of how to respond. "Of course I want to win. My family is why. I haven't seen my parents in years, since they forced.. Uh, since I *moved* in with a roommate. I've never had the chance to talk to them. I guess I just want to see them again, before I die. Even if it's only for a bit.."

Schlatt's provoked hostility vanquishes as Connor's anguish slices through the atmosphere. He slowly sits back down, immediately feeling stupid for lashing out like that.

*What the fuck was that for, Schlatt? Of course he has a reason, you delusional idiot. Apologise to him. Tell him you didn't mean what you said. Just say something.* ***Anything.***

"Sorry." Is all he ends up muttering.

There's an awkward silence.

Connor stands up, murmuring.

"You're right. We'll get out of here, Schlatt. Somehow, we'll make it out alive.
I'm going to get some shut-eye. See you tomorrow morning, dude."

Eventually, Schlatt had found himself lugubriously drifting off to sleep beside the small fire.

Hours pass until his consciousness is awoken by the sounds of two buzzes from his phone.

Groggily, he rubs his eyes as he checks.

Everything around him stops.

**There have been two deaths.**

# ➳ CHAPTER 30: you stole my kill

**[play the music for better effect :) ]**

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***NUMBER 14 — CONNOR***

Every single muscle in his body tenses stiffly; his blood runs cold as he takes quick, sharp breaths. His hands shoot to the front of his head, gripping tightly as his frontal lobe thumps like the force of a hammer pounding in nails. He opens his mouth to scream, but nothing comes out.

In the blink of an eye, the torturous pain stops ever so suddenly; panting, he drops back down.

*WHAT JUST HAPPENED?*

He sucks in a breath of air, closing his eyes as he tries to speak.

*SCHLATT?*

But he hears nothing come out his throat.

He involuntarily pushes himself up from the ground, and gets up on two feet.

*WHAT?*

He tries to lay back down. But he can't; Instead, he feels his legs pick up and shuffle quietly over the leaves to his backpack.

His fingers dig into the depths of his bag, hooking around a metal handgun. He smiles. But that's not what he's feeling.

*I JUST WANT TO GO TO SLEEP.*

He turns around, adjusting his grip on his pistol. With slow, swift steps, he spontaneously walks past some trees. He sees Schlatt resting beside a log.

He walks past Schlatt, heading towards the arch of trees where Technoblade is.

He feels his adrenaline rise drastically, pumping a rush of blood through his veins.

*IS THIS A DREAM?*

He swats a tree branch standing in his way, revealing a spacious area from within the bushes. He sees Technoblade lying down on the floor with his back facing him; Dark, crimson, dried blood is painted along the grass floor and his body.

He realises now, what is happening. He opens his mouth to scream, but nothing comes out.

*NO, NO, NO. I DON'T WANT THIS. I DON'T WANT THIS.*

He stops walking, and his shadow his towering over Techno's still body. He lowers the pistol in his hand, cocking the handgun as he aims it at Techno's forehead.

A grin crawls along the corners of his lips.

*NO, STOP. PLEASE. STOP. I DON'T.. I DON'T WANT TO KILL MY FRIEND.*

But before he's able to pull the trigger, he feels something cold slice along the back of his neck.

✧ ◡ ⊰ ✖ ⊱ ◡ ✧

***TECHNOBLADE***

His eyelids snap open, and he jerks around to see Connor standing in front of him with a pistol in hand. He crawls back, elbows on the ground with his sight is transfixed on Connor.

Half his body is hidden underneath the shadows of the trees surrounding them. His brown hair hangs over his face, and his eyes are glowing a crazed, cyan blue. Before Techno has the time to do anything, Connor's legs give out from beneath him. He falls, collapsing to his knees as he cranes his neck around. While it is dark, Techno can see rivers of blood spilling out from back of Connor's neck.

He looks up to see whose the victim of this, and sees an emerging, hooded figure stand from behind where Connor once stood.

He purses his lips.

"AntVenom?"

Taylor grins, bending over with his hands on his knees as he pants. He drops the knife from his hand.

"Told you," he breathes shakily, "Truce is a truce, remember?"

*A truce?*

Oh right, he almost forgot about the truce they made. Admittedly, he finds himself actually *surprised* that AntVenom had stuck to the truce. Pulling a move like that could be *seriously* detrimental to his game. And he's already in a vulnerable position.

Taylor frowns. "You forgot?"

"No, of course not. I'm just.. Surprised that you were *actually* serious."

"I'm telling you man, I don't want to pull anything."

Techno looks down, scratching the back of his neck. "... I could have died. I don't understand why you would go through the effort to save me. Taylor, *why'd you do it?"*

"Why'd I do it?" He repeats, and he gives him a downcast but

genuine smile. "I.. I just kinda missed having someone to talk to. Since Captain's... Y'know."

His voice trails off, leaving the two fall silent as the crisp, yet heavy air of the illuminated night coils around them.

Now he knows. Why Taylor is fighting.

AntVenom has no motive to become God, nor no intention to kill Technoblade.

He just wants to *survive.* He misses having friends. A family. And a life.

He did not kill Cooper out of spite. He killed him so he could unlock his ability to give himself a sense of security.

He can only presume that when CaptainSparklez had died, Ant would have been nearby to witness the event. He probably abandoned him because he was too *scared.*

Just like any human, AntVenom is afraid of death.

*This man isn't an idiot. He's just a coward.*

Ant's gaze falls to Techno's as he murmurs.

"I'm sorry... For doing that to your friend."

"You mean killing Cooper?" Techno tilts his head, "Is that what went through your head when you blew him up?"

"Wh- No. *No*! I didn't want to, I swear! Please believe me—!"

"Oh, I do believe you."

He looks at him, narrowing his eyes. "But a man who only ever wallows in his own self-pity to try make himself feel like a better person is nothing more than a *coward.*

We may have killed someone, but there's a vast difference between us murderers, AntVenom.

Because I at least have the *balls* to own up to the fact that I am one."

AntVenom's left speechless for a minute.

"I thought sticking to the truce would maybe earn some trust from you. But I guess that's not gonna happen, huh?" He laughs nervously.

"HankVenom," Techno smiles at him, and his fingers slowly inch closer to the knife Ant had dropped. "What do you mean? Of course I trust you."

Ant blinks, stumbling along his words at the unexpected response. "Wait, seriously?"

Techno laughs. "No."

Swift reflexives kicking in, he grabs the knife and readies to aim.

*"I loathe people like you.* And making that truce was *the worst mistake you could have made, Taylor."*

He ditches the knife at him, and it darts across the air before skewering into Taylor's right eye.

- - -

Ant screams, falling down as he tries to pull the knife out. Techno remains calm, standing up as he brushes the dirt off of him.

He turns to look at Connor, whose laying lifeless on the ground.

"I can't *believe* you stole my kill," He mutters under his breath.

Suddenly, a man runs in, kicking down a bush in his way. It's Schlatt, and his face is a petrified mess. He stops, eyeing Technoblade from his head to feet, before turning his attention to Connor's body.

He freezes, paralysed in utter terror as he drops his phone from his hands. Tears form around the outskirts of Schlatt's bloodshot eyes; His legs are trembling, only just barely supporting his weight. His hands are shaking , and sweat is pouring down his forehead.

A long minute passes before Schlatt's consciousness is somewhat able to sink back into reality. He rushes over to Connor's bloody body, dropping on his knees.

*"C...Connor!"*

His disorientated shriek tears raw through his throat as he puts his hands on both sides of Connor's cheek, turning him around to lay on his back. He almost drops him from his hands as he takes in the sight of his bloodied face.

Pools of fresh, everflowing blood is streaming down from Connor's bottom lip; His face is a ghostly pale, and his cobalt eyes have lost it's colourful gloss of life.

"Connor...?" Schlatt whispers again, leaning close to Connor's face as he taps his check with his hand. "Buddy? G-Get up, man. Stop m-messing around. Connor, wake up. *Y-You can't leave me, not now."*

But as much as he tries to convince himself that, it's useless; Schlatt knows very well that Connor won't wake up.

A cry slips from his mouth, and he puts his head in his friend's chest before bursting into racked sobs. Techno watches silently as Schlatt's muffled cries echo throughout the night.

"*C-Connor, no, no, no,"* He chokes on his words, tears of his heartache rolling down his face with his head in his chest, clinging onto Connor's damp shirt. "*You can't die now. It's not fair, it's not fair! It's not..."*

"There's nothing you can do." Technoblade says gravely, "He's dead."

Schlatt's shoulders stop shaking, and his cries quieten. Techno bends down and rips out the knife from Taylor's eye, wiping the blood on his shirt.

Without looking back, he calls for Schlatt. "Well c'mon. I'm tired, and I need to find somewhere else to sleep, because this place is covered with b—"

A fist to his jaw from Schlatt stops him from saying anything. "*WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?"* He screams at him.

"What was that for?" Techno frowns, rubbing his cheek. Schlatt looks mortified.

"Connor just *died!* And all you care about is *sleep?* How the fuck can you sleep after seeing our friend die *right in front of you?!"*

Techno doesn't know how to answer this.

"What the *fuck* happened to you?"

Rivers of tears spill down from his blotchy eyes as he yells at him. "You never used to be like this. You're.. *You're a monster.* I mean, I couldn't give two shits about Hank over there — But *Connor!! He's dead!* And you don't even seem to care, you *sick son of a bitch! I SHOULD HAVE NEVER SAVED YOU THAT NIGHT. I SHOULD HAVE JUST LEFT YOU TO DIE JUST LIKE HOW YOU LEFT CONNOR."*

He throws another fist at him, but Techno catches it an inch away from his face with the palm of his hand. Schlatt's arm drops, and he puts his head in his hands.

"It's my fault. It's my fault he's dead, isn't it? Because it's *always my fault. For everything.* I-If I just didn't lash out at and yell at him last night, none of this would have happened. I- I- I failed h—"

"It's not your fault."

He looks up at him. "Why?"

"Because Connor tried to kill me in my sleep. That is, until AntVenom had jumped out from nowhere and killed him. But he's dead now, too."

His face is solemn as he speaks, staring attentively into Schlatt's eyes; he's left speechless.

"Connor would have probably done this whether or not you had an argument," Techno says, "You shouldn't put yourself to blame. He died at his own fault, and he should have been alerted of his death message. I'm too tired to think of why the hell he *would* do that, but what happened happened. Now I'm going to sleep. Goodnight, Schlatt."

And he walks off, leaving Schlatt all alone as he stands beside the body of the only man who had ever accepted him.

✧ ✖ ✧

***NUMBER 13 — JOKO***

The gust of tranquil, dawning wind blows gently through his hair as he holds his phone up in front of his face.

***USER 7*** *HAS SLIT* ***USER 14'S NECK***
***USER 14 HAS REACHED A DEAD END.***
***USER 1*** *HAS STABBED* ***USER 7'S*** *EYE OUT.*

***USER 7 HAS REACHED A DEAD END.***
***CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'RE THE FINAL 5!***

" 'Bout time Ant died." He mumbled.

*Of course Techno was involved.*

"Joko?" he hears a voice call from behind him, "Why are you wearing a shoe on your head?"

"Good morning Trav," He answers, keeping still; not moving his gaze away from the sunrise on the sea's horizon before him. His legs are crossed, sitting only a meter away from the ledge of the small cliff.

Travis crawls over to sit beside Joko, who is balancing a shoe on his head.

"Two people died last night." Joko states bluntly.

Travis goes silent, and Joko continues to elaborate. "AntVenom killed 14. And Technoblade finished off Ant. We're the final five."

He closes his eyes, almost unable to believe that it's actually *real*. He was in the final 5. He had managed to outlast *10 people*.

When the game had first started, he had no clue on what to do. It was all so sudden. One minute, he was living a stable life with his girlfriend, and the next he had found himself running away from home.

From there, his motives and plans were scattered; head empty, numb with shock, the only thing he was able to bring himself to do was to survive. And the only way to progress in the game was to *kill*.

He had planned on going solo until a few weeks ago, his diary had alerted him of something; A nearby hospital on the verge of exploding with multiple players inside, and according to his diary, if he gets involved, he'll make an ally. He considered the idea— It would *definitely* be useful to his game.

So he did. An hour prior to the hospital's destruction, he snuck into the police station using his key card, and stacked up on supplies — Specifically, emergency fire blankets.

After doing so, he made his way to the hospital and ran into the underground parking lot. Seconds before it went up in flames, he jumped over a boy, holding the blanket around them both as he dragged him out to escape.

He has no idea *how* he managed to survive it, but he did.

And that boy he saved was Travis.

He managed to find out that Travis had been allies with Technoblade — AKA, the kid God claimed had the highest advantage in his game. And it didn't help that he also found out he was a 5 in strength.

After the explosion, Joko helped Travis out of sight, falling into

the forest near the collapsed building.

Travis seemed to have passed out, meaning that he was left alone with Joko. He was notified almost immediately after that Techno was going to try to find and re-unite with Travis again.

And that was when Joko knew — He knew that this game was more than just survival. Being strong was only a small factor contributing to this.

The *real* key to winning is strategy. He had to use deception; perception; and conception in order to win.

He had to get Travis to put his trust in him before Techno could get his hands on him again. Even if that means having to manipulate him using *fear*.

Because if there was one thing stronger than trusting out of faith, it's fear; Faith cannot save you, but fear can.

*Fear* is an ideology that connects people in ways more twisted than hope; Faith in someone only lasts for a certain period of time. But fear. That can last *forever*.

Being killed was already a fear in this game, but that wouldn't be enough to pull at Travis's sense of faith. Joko had to dig deeper into finding out the kind of person Travis is — What could possibly be more terrifying than dying?

But the answer came clear to him. What he feared most is being *betrayed*.

He didn't want to do it, he really didn't. But the only way to get him on his side was to change his way of thinking — To make him believe that the *very thing he had believed in had turned against him.*

Making Travis believe that only Joko could be the only he could trust.

For someone with a 4 in intelligence, it was sure easy to make him fall completely in his hands. Sure, he had to do a little lying to get his hands on his phone, but it was the only way to stop him from having contact with Technoblade.

And so, his goal was then to use Travis as his way of eliminating Techno - and that had been his plan for a while.

Until God set the bounty on him, which messed up everything.

He doesn't want to be free. He wants — No, he *needs* to be God. He needs to be God to...

*No, I can't think about that right now.*

So instead, Joko had to move to another strategy. A strategy that would both involve the death of Techno, and heighten his chance at becoming God; And that is having *Travis* kill him instead. Not only Travis would be free, but that would also mean his biggest target would be gone, and from there he can cruise the game easily. On the plus side, he'd also get Travis' catchphrase. He asked God about

it earlier in his encounter, and it is very much possible.

What had made Joko's job even easier, in fact, is that Techno seemed to have converted *without* his help. His new bloodlust is completely out-of-character of him, but he can only assume it's Techno finally deciding to use his power to his full potential.

And now, with Connor gone, their alliance of three has broken. It will probably only fall from here, so *now* would be the perfect time to strike.

"Joko." Travis finally speaks, breaking him out of his train of thought. Joko turns to look at him, dropping the shoe off his head as it falls into his lap.

"You didn't answer my question. Why are you wearing a shoe on your head?"

Travis' profound glare cuts through the thick atmosphere between them. Joko just shrugs.

"Bored."

Travis' eyes narrow at him. "Joko. You *are* Joko*,* aren't you?"

Joko blinks. "Of course."

Travis stares at him hard for a little bit, before returning back to his usual, optimistic self.

"Okay then!"

But then Travis says something that almost makes Joko fall off the cliff.

"So, can we go kill Technoblade now?"

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

# ➳ CHAPTER 31: HE'S NOT HUMAN

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

***WELCOME TO MIRAI SMP'S FINAL FIVE.***

***PREVIOUSLY ON...***

*A grin crawls along the corners of his lips.*

*He feels something cold slice along the back of his neck.*

*He looks up to see whose the victim of this, and sees an emerging, hooded figure stand from behind where Connor once stood.*

*"AntVenom?"*

*A fist to his jaw from Schlatt stops him from saying anything.*

*"WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?" He screams at him.*

*But then Travis says something that almost makes Joko fall off the cliff.*

*"So, can we go kill Technoblade now?"*

✧×□°*❋ ❋*°□×✧

***TY***

It's 9AM, and his CS:GO session is intervened by a phonecall from who he can only assume is Tommyinnit.

"You should really stop leaving your status as online," Tommy says as Ty picks up his phone.

"Probably. Morning Tommy," Ty remarks.

*At least it's not midnight, I'll give him that.*

"I have something *incredibly* urgent to tell you Ty. But first, is he asleep?"

"You mean Ryan?" Ty asks, turning around. Ryan's still asleep on the mattress, snoring peacefully.

"Yeah, he is. Why?"

"Okay, well... I've been thinking about this for a bit."

Ty nods slowly as he hears his friend speak through the phone. He quits his game and sets down his PS4 controller, already predicting this will be quite a long call.

"Thinking about what, Tommy?" He queries.

"About that guy who crashed into your room. Ryan."

Pause.

"... Well, I realised that what happened is physically impossible. There is *no* possible way that he should have survived that—"

"That's what I thought too," Ty interrupts him hurriedly, "But you're wrong. Dr. Halo had told me that it's possible for a person to

be stabbed in the stomach to survive. As long as no vital organs or arteries connecting *to* vital organs are punctured, there's actually a good chance of survival. And I've done a little research myself to fact-check it, and he's right. Ryan's lucky that the sword had only just stabbed him right under the ribcage."

"No, no, no!" Tommy argues back, "No, I'm not talking about being stabbed in the stomach, Ty! I'm talking about being flown 300-fucking-feet across the air and into your room, *that's what!"*

Tommy's voice raises mildly as he speaks, and he settles down his aggressive tone in voice a little after realising this. He clears his throat, not bothering to wait for Ty's response to that.

"I've been doing a little of my *own* research. Listen, I looked up the brand of the grappling hook you talked about: 4-Claw Zip 72. It's hipline's maximum velocity is 200mph, and it hits that at around 250 feet. If he's thrown roughly 300 feet, he would have hit it's maximum speed already."

Ty hums, still oblivious to what Tommy's trying to get at. "And what's your point?"

"Hey, I'm getting to that. At the speed Ryan was going, he would have crashed and flown through at least *5 solid walls.* But instead, he landed perfectly in the centre of your room — And even more weirder, he crashed through *glass,* which is a weak material! If he had crashed into your room, you'd think he'd at least crash up against the opposite wall. But no, he landed *right in the middle of your floor.* A little suspicious, huh? A momentum build up like that.. He should have *died* as soon as his body touched a physical object."

*What?*

If he was meant to die, how come he's still *here?*

"What are you trying to say?" The low resonance of Ty's voice sparks Tommy's seriousness a little more. With a sombre tone, he talks:

"I'm *saying* that *no human would have a chance at surviving twice the impact of a car crash."*

There's a pause as Ty thinks about this.

*There's no way, right? There's no way he's right, right?*

If he *was* right, then none of this would make any sense. How would he still be alive?

But... On the off-chance that Tommy is telling the truth; That Ryan could very well not be a human at all - what exactly *could* he be?

"So you're saying Ryan's a zombie?" he scoffs sarcastically, but deep down in his gut, the idea actually seemed even the slightest bit possible.

"Well you're not wrong, he may be. Have you asked? Does he give off any.. Like, zombie energy? Acting sus?"

Tommy's questions ramble on, but Ty isn't listening.

*Well, come to think of it... It was a little weird how he sat up, talked to me, and then fell unconscious again with no memory of doing so. And why was his arm numb? He didn't even land on his side. Could he be another life form? A 'zombie' doesn't seem to...*

He smacks himself in the head.

*No, what am I saying?! I talked to him — There's no* ***way*** *he's a zombie!*

"Has he tried eating your brai—"

"Tommy, this is stupid! God, of *course* he's human! You've been watching too much of the Walking Dead."

"Okay, okay, fine," Tommy ushers. There's a few seconds of silence before he speaks up again. ".. So you're *sure* he's human?"

"*Yes!!"*

"Okay, well.. I guess that just leaves only the second option."

He hears Tommy swallow uneasily, and Ty feels an arising anxious feeling in his stomach.

"What's the second option?" he asks apprehensively.

There's a cackle of static in the phone, and Ty can hear Tommy exhale.

"*Whoever healed him isn't human."*

*Whoever healed him?*

But... Dr. Halo healed him. He can't be a zombie — he's a certified nurse!

"You know what you're saying is crazy, right?" Ty frowns.

"Think about it. Being stabbed in the stomach and thrown 300 feet into the air and crash-landing into someones room is *one* thing. But having someone with the capability of completely *healing* you from an injury like that in only a few days.. That's *definitely* impossible. And even if it was, someone like that would work in a place with highly professional medics, not some crappy skyscraper hospital. Either Ryan's not human, or that *Doctor isn't."*

Tommy stops talking, leaving time for Ty to actually process what he just said.

He never really *believed* in zombies or spirits. But after only being told a few days ago about the existence of (a rather rude) God, who *knows* what else could exist out there.

He turns around and takes another good look at Ryan.

*He's human, right? He has to be.*

"Actually, no. You're right." Tommy suddenly says after a moment of silence. "This is actually kinda stupid. I did just binge walking dead last week so it's probably getting in my head now. Anyways, I have to go, my sister wants me to play MC with her. See ya later, Ty!"

He hangs up, leaving Ty speechless in his own entangled thoughts.

*... Could Dr. Halo really be a zombie?*

✧ ⁓ ✖ ⁓ ✧

***TECHNOBLADE***

*'I SHOULD HAVE JUST LEFT YOU TO DIE JUST LIKE HOW YOU LEFT CONNOR.'*

He can't help but allow the words Schlatt had yelled at him that night echo within his mind. Did he really mean what he said?

*About leaving him to die?*

He closes his open palm, resting his hands on his lap as he props himself further up against a tree. The feeling he has doesn't sit right in his stomach. Once again, a feeling ever so foreign to him — the same feeling he had felt when Travis had pushed him away from his embrace a week back. Has it really been that long?

*What is this feeling again? Hurt?*

Something about the way Schlatt's yells of enmity had torn out his throat with a burning resentment he could only have dared to imagine himself witnessing; fury springing to life, both his own devastation and rage had consumed him and shot through his veins, all happening so fast in the moment.

Techno shuts his eyes tight, before putting a hand to the stab wound in his shoulder to try take his mind off things. He never thought he'd end up finding *physical* pain more relieving than psychological pain.

"Ow," he quietly yelps as he touches his lesion, almost unable to believe that the victim of this was none other than Travis.

Never had he imagined Travis picking up the courage to *hurt* someone. The last time he can remember him doing that was way back at the hospital, where Travis tried to shoot AntVenom. But even doing that, he seemed hesitant.

*I wonder what Joko had done to him this whole time.*

There's a sudden rustle in the leaves behind him, and he quickly turns around. It's Schlatt.

Lips sealed shut and eyes wandering low, Schlatt doesn't say a word. Instead, he walks over to him and sits down beside Techno.
Techno tilts his head, stumped as to why he's so silent. Until he realises what had happened last night.

With Connor dying.

He looks away, contemplating if he should say something or not. He concludes he should.

"It's not your fault for what happened last night," Techno says to him, "it's—"

"I just don't get it."

Techno pauses, watching as Schlatt's chafed, amber eyes trail from the grass to the trees ahead of him, not staring at anything in particular.

Schlatt fiddles with his hands as he mumbles. "I don't get *why* Connor did that. And I don't know how you did it, but I got *zero* fucking sleep last night, Techno. *Zero*. My eyelids feel like they've been held open with a pair of toothpicks for 10 hours."

He turns to look at Techno, who remains solemn as he intently listens.

"It's not like him at all. Connor would *never* try to kill you. Every time he'd talk about you, he'd always say how he thinks you're so brave. He wouldn't stop going on about how determined you always were, and how he could never get the balls to be as bold as you. So.. I just can't... Understand what the *fuck* went wrong there."

"Yeah," Techno sighs, leaning his chin on his knees, which he's hugging to his chest. "I guess we're both just sitting clueless here at the moment."

Schlatt nods slowly, and the crisp silence of the morning coils delicately around his fingers. Techno looks away, breaking eye contact. He decides to tell him what's been on his mind for a while.

"Did you really mean what you said last night?" Techno finds himself murmuring involuntarily, "about how you should have left me to die?"

"What?" Schlatt gapes, "I.. I said that?"

He nods. "You did."

"Really?" he insists again, only gaining another nod as a reply. "God, this is like getting a hangover from being drunk at a club all over again, except this time instead two people were brutally murdered by a serial killer with a knife."

He half-laughs at what he said, but deep down Techno knows that this is just Schlatt's way of trying to cope. After noticing Techno isn't laughing, Schlatt pauses. His smile curves down to a frown, and he pinches the bridge of his nose, scrunching his eyes as he mumbles. "Okay, guess that wasn't as funny as I thought, huh? Just everything from last night is such a blur. The only thing I remember is seeing Connor's dead..."

The rest of his voice diminishes; sentence subsided by a choked back cry as he tries to contain himself from having another outburst of sobs. He throws a hand to clasp his mouth, digging his fingernails into his cheek as his eyes well up with tears.

"I can't believe he's gone, man," he cries. "He's.. *He's really gone."*

He covers his face with his hands, sobbing softly. Techno watches in silence.

Until like a natural reflex, he wraps an arm around him, trying to comfort him.

*"It's okay."*

"No, it's *not okay!"* He snaps his head up. *"Connor's dead!* The game is almost over, and it won't be long before I'll reach the end of *my* line either! I don't know how much more of this living-fucking-hell I can take! I don't know what's going on anymore, and frankly*, I think suicide's actually looking like a pretty plausible option here!"*

"I don't really know what's going on either, but it's best to just move on," Techno says, rubbing the side of Schlatt's arm in an attempt to calm him down. "He's gone now, and time isn't gonna stop to wait for us to catch our breaths. We have to get our head back in this game if we want to survive. We can't let Connor's death drag *us* down."

He feels Schlatt stop shaking from beneath his arm, realising that whatever he did must have worked a little. Schlatt sniffs, wiping his eyes as he nods.

"He's watching us now, I know it." Techno adds, releasing his hand from Schlatt. As he pulls away from him, he looks into his watery eyes with his imperial red and genuine orbs. "Connor would want us to move on from his death and get out of here."

"You know, one of us has to die, right?" Schlatt mutters back. "There's no such *thing* as us making it out of here."

He falls quiet.

*He does have a point. I don't want to give the guy a false sense of hope if I'm going to win.*

Technoblade creases his lips, trying to find the right words for this unexpected and unfortunate sequences of events.

"Well, we can't split up now, Schlatt. Or else we'll be the next most vulnerable targets."

He opens his hand, holding it out to the businessman.

"You like deals, right? How about we make one? We have to stick together until the very end, okay? **Always stick together.**"

A very vague memory triggers itself in the back of his mind as he says those three words, but he can't recall *where* he heard it.

Schlatt glances down at his hand, and gives him one last hesitant stare; grabbing his hand, he shakes it to finalise their promise.

*Yeah.* Schlatt thinks to himself. ***We'll stick together until the end.***

He opens his mouth to say this, but before has the chance to even say anything, the two are interjected by the sound of the annoying noise that comes from Techno's phone in every single inconvenient time possible.

Techno picks it up, wondering what on earth could possibly ruin this morning.

*PLAYERS NUMBER 12 AND 13 ARE HUNTING FOR YOU.*
*THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A FINAL SHOWDOWN.*
*IF YOU CHOOSE TO CONFRONT YOUR VICTIMS, YOUR SHOWDOWN WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE MOUNTAINS, BESIDE A FOREST NEAR A LAKE.*
*LOCATION: 40KM AWAY.*
*90% HOSTILITY.*
*YOU SHOULD PROBABLY GET MOVING NOW.*

As Schlatt leans over to try catch a glimpse of what the phone says, Techno just staggeredly blinks.

"... Well, I guess that's *one* way to make this morning a little more interesting."

# ➳ CHAPTER 32: get the hell out.

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

***NUMBER 13 — JOKO***

"Are you sure you want to do this? *Now?"*

The words slide uneasily out his throat, making his nerves get the better of him as he anxiously clutches his handgun in hand. The two boys are walking through the woods, under an archway of trees.

With his other hand, Joko's holding his phone in hand, reading the message he's been sent very carefully.

*PLAYERS NUMBER 15 AND 1 ARE HEADING TOWARD THE MOUNTAINS, BESIDE A FOREST NEAR A LAKE. YOU'LL GET THERE IN 10.*
*SUGGESTED FORM OF PUNISHMENT: CLASSIC SHOOT TO THE HEAD.*

"Of course!"

Travis gives an innocent smile at him, making him break from his glare at the phone; considering the situation they're in, he finds himself rather surprised at Travis' unusual enthusiasm. Travis tilts his head in confusion.

"You don't seem that happy about it, Joko."

"Happy?" Joko suggests, "well, I wouldn't say 'happy' is the right, uh.. Word."

"Are you scared?" Travis asks him. "I thought you were waiting for this day to come."

Joko pauses for a minute. "Yeah.. I was. But, uh. I just.. Didn't think it would be you who would offer the idea. That's all."

Travis gives a little hum at this, making Joko ponder whether Travis is either just in a good mood, or he's a psychopath. Though either option seems just as likely as the other.

"So we're sticking to the plan then, right?" Joko inquires, clearing his throat as he carefully puts his phone back into his pocket. "We've been in an alliance with Schlatt before, and we obviously know he's the weaker one out of the two. So I'll take him down first. Then once he's down, you'll help me take down Techno. Then you can finish him off, and get your ticket outta here. That's what we're doing, yeah?"

He has to remember to keep reminding himself that Travis is supposed to be the one to kill Techno, not him. And come to think

of it.. Could this be the reason why Travis is so willing to kill Technoblade?

Because he'll be free if he does so?

No.. That doesn't really seem right. If he wanted freedom that badly, he would have killed him already.

*Or would it be that perhaps whatever... I... did to him — Must have managed to convert him to thirst for blood?*

"Yep." Travis gives him a thumbs-up. "Don't worry, I remember."

A skeptical "hmm" is all Joko replies with, before falling silent again; his mind already formulating a thousand ways how this plan could backfire.

*What if Techno kills him? Or if he kills me? What if we're not strong enough, and they're extremely prepared? Not that they would benefit us since we'll be in the same area. Oh no, oh fuck.*

He gives one last concerning glance at Travis through the crevices of his mask — Travis's stance is serene and unfazed as he's hopping over the leaves on the dirty pathway like a 10 year old without a care in the world. A few minutes pass by with just silence.

"Hey, Joko." Travis asks softly, breaking the quietness of the crackling, dried-up leaves and shuffling of their shoes. *"Can you hold my hand?"*

Being caught slightly off-guard by his request, he can definitely say it wasn't a question he was expecting.

He holds out his hand to Travis, and feels the smaller boy's hand cup inside his; and the two continue to walk together along the turf pathway scattered with fallen leaves until they finally reach their destination.

✧⁘✖⁘✧

***TECHNOBLADE***

*NUMBER 12 AND 13 ARE 100M AWAY*

"They're 100 meters away." Techno reads aloud from his phone, looking to Schlatt.

Schlatt's hands are shaking as he double checks his lock on his pistol, which sat comfortably in the side holster attached to his belt. His heart is racing, tight inside his chest; pounding hard like the sounds of a drum being beaten with a rod. He swallows, as the heavy bags under his eyes pull down his face.

"I am not happy with this sequence of events, Technoblade," He breathes in slight panic and anxiousness. "I can't do this."

A gust of wind blows through the trees, running through Techno's hazel-to-rose-pink coloured hair as he feels it dance gently in the breeze of the thick, mountain air. Techno's dark red hood flows lightly amidst the soft gale, almost like a *robe.*

The lake a few meters beside them shimmers under the morning

light, as it's surrounded by the valley's trees.

Luckily, they had a good supply of weapons from their previous fights — A gun, his sword which he got from an armoury the night they were planning 9 and 10's assassination, *and* grappling hooks.

"They won't stop until they find us," Techno responds, standing still with his sword in hand, "here will be our showdown. Here, we'll finish this."

He glances down at his phone again.

"50 meters."

Distressed, Schlatt tugs at Techno's wrist as he desperately asks. "Do you think we'll make it out alive?"

Techno looks at him, dead in the eyes as he answers with full honesty. "I don't know."

"What are we gonna do once they show up?" he entreats. "Fight those bastards?"

He doesn't have the energy to chuckle at his own insults, much less try to act calm about it. So far, Schlatt hasn't received any 'DEAD END' messages, which he can only assume that means he'll make it out alive...

... *Right?*

"They're probably gonna give some sort of dramatic speech," Techno shrugs. "We'll wait for them to do that, then engage. You know what to do. You focus on Travis, I'll focus on Joko. Trav should be ea..."

.. *Easy to kill.*

His voice trails off as he becomes aware of what he's thinking. He feels something tug at the strings of his heart as he says this out loud. He's almost at awe with how much things have changed.

*Travis.*

From being his first ever friend in this place.

.. To being the man he's targeting to kill.

And he can only think of one question that's been remaining unanswered at the back of his mind for a long, *long* time:

*What the hell went wrong?*

He checks his phone one more time:

"10 more— "

"Yo, Technoblade."

The two jerks around at the voice.

A waving, masked boy alongside his feeble companion emerges from behind the Mountain's arch of autumn trees.

———

"Oh hey there, Gay-schlatt." Joko calls out, around 20 meters away from the two. "Been a while, huh? I think the last time we properly talked was when you betrayed me."

Behind seething, clenched teeth, Schlatt lets out a forced scoff. "So you're making *me* the victim? Joko, you should know better than to trust a man you just met. Especially if he's a fucking *scammer."*

Joko shrugs. "I could con better than you."

"Is that a challenge?"

"Challenge?" He queries. "For *scamming*? Kinda lame. How about we challenge for something with a little more on the line... Like living?"

"You mean like your life?" Techno corrects his bad pronunciation.

"Shut up, hog man. That's what I meant," He scowls, followed by a snarky scoff. "But enough of this. I'm not here to have a friendly conversation with you, Technoblade. I'm here to *kill you."*

In a flash, Joko charges over to Schlatt, swinging a kick at his side. Caught off guard by the abrupt attack, Schlatt splutters as he stumbles to his knees. Vision hazy, he somehow manages to get back up on his two feet fast enough before Joko could land another round-house kick. As he jumps up, Schlatt raises a hand, throwing his fist towards Joko's cheek. Joko leans swiftly to the side, dodging the blow as Schlatt lurches forward..

He feels a clasped fist ram itself into his lower jaw. A surge of pain shoots all along his mouth, and he can't help but shriek out in agony as he loses his footing. Tripping**,** he rips out his gun from his holster.

"Fuck, fuck , fuck *YOU!"* he yells, holding down the trigger; a swarm of bullets spray out from the muzzle of his gun as he waves it around aimlessly. Joko jumps up from behind him, grabbing his wrist and yanking down his hand, causing Schlatt to misfire a bullet at his own shoe.

*"AAAARGHHHHHFUUUUUUUCK!"* He howls, dropping his gun as he collapses to the floor.

"You can't beat me, I'm stronger than you." Joko spits, stomping on his bleeding-out foot as he walks away. "You're p.. *Pathetic*."

Meanwhile, Technoblade pounces onto Travis as soon as Joko starts running. Like as if a prey's reflexes had kicked in, Travis jolts around, breaking into a sprint through the cluster of trees he had come from with Techno chasing him right behind his tail.

*A game of predator VS prey, huh? I'd like to see you try, Trav.*

To his unlikely surprise, Travis wasn't all that bad at running. But it won't be too long until he runs out of stamina.

Techno's sight darts from left to right, trying to catch his eye on something that would bring him to the upper advantage. He feels around his waist for the specific weapon he's looking for.

*Aha!* He exclaims in his head, coiling his fingers around the metal grip of his grappling hook. Travis made a life-threatening mistake of running into the forests — Trees are his strength.

He cocks up the gun, firing at a tree far ahead the direction which Travis is running at. He clutches the handle of his sheathed sword, pulling it out as his feet lift up from the ground, towing his body through the air. A split second before he zooms past Travis, he whips out his sword in an attempt to slash his neck while he flies.

But he misses.

Because Travis leans forward, missing the slice by a mere inch as the slash of the sword cuts off only a strand of his hair.

*What? How did he see that coming? Can he manifest a reaction time* ***that*** *short? Damn, I may have underestimated his abilities.*

Techno hisses under his breath at this, and he reaches the end of the grappling hook's zip-line, landing on top of a tree branch a few tens of meters in front. To his left, the forest turns a corner, leading to the downhill slope of the mountain. This gives Travis an opening, and he turns left, nearing the steep slope.

*There's no way he's going down. He'll slip along the mud and fall - He's got to turn around.*

Thinking fast, he lifts up his sword, wrapping the gun's hook around it's handle before shooting it like a spear to the ground where the beginning of the slope starts. Once the sword jabs halfway down into the ground, he gives the zip-line a little tug to make sure it's secure; then he pulls the trigger again, soaring as he lands swiftly onto the ground, a few meters behind the running Travis.

*I have the advantage now.*

But to his surprise, Travis does not turn around. Instead, he jumps down, sliding down the mountain's slope with his feet spread apart, bending down steady like a skateboarder coasting on a board.

*Two can play at that game.*

He grins, pulling out his sword from the ground as he also jumps down the sloping hill — Laughing deliriously, he yells at him.

*"You can't get away from me, Travis!"*

Travis doesn't answer, remaining focused as he tries to keep his balance on sliding down the mud-filled slope.

Eventually, Travis' feet hit the bottom of the grassy mountain slope, followed by another valley painted with a blossoming field of grass, flowers, and trees. He kicks off from the incline, breaking into a fierce sprint. Techno reaches the bottom a few seconds after, right behind Travis' tail. He catches up to him, and pulls out his sword, slamming the pommel on his waist — Travis stops running, almost falling over from the minor attack.

*This is where you die.*

Travis whips around, and Techno grabs him by the neck with his right hand, whilst the other holding his sword to his neck. He brings the sword up to his neck as his psychedelic rose eyes intertwine with his, feeling the smaller boy's body quiver beneath the grip around his neck; Travis' wide, fawn pools glisten with a fearful innocence — his soul-stirring terror cutting through the surface of his skin. And like gaining one last trembling gasp of sanity, Techno's stare softens as he's brought back a vague but wistful memory.

*ALWAYS. STICK. TOGETHER.*

His clutch on his sword shakes in his hand, as he slowly lowers it, remembering.

Remembering Cooper.

Remembering their friendship.

Remembering **what he done.**

"Travis..."

Before he can finish, he feels his entire body yank back, his arms being pulled behind him. He twists around, and notices his hands are..

"Pretty coincidental how I have these handcuffs with me."

Joko smiles from behind his mask, showing up out of nowhere. His mask is scratched and he looks like he put up a decent fight.

Stopping Techno from saying anything more, he kicks him down face-first to the dirt floor with his hands cuffed behind his back.

"Where's Schlatt?!" Techno yells, voice muffled through the dirt.

"Don't worry, he's not dead yet." Joko sighed, pinning Techno to the ground with the sole of his shoe. "I'll deal with him later."

He pushes down harder, making Techno groan from under his foot. "Kill him, Travis."

Travis shuffles closer.

"Wait, Joko..." Travis tugs at his hoodie, looking at him with big, honest eyes. "You.. Tell the truth, right? *Always?"*

He blinks, slightly annoyed at the unnecessary question. "Uh, yeah. 'Course."

Travis purses his lips at the response, before asking him virtuously. "Why were you wearing a shoe on your head this morning?"

"... What do you mean?" He asks slowly, an unsure waver catching in his words.

"I remember you mumbled *why* quietly to me, but I forgot what you said," Travis scratches his chin. "Don't you remember?

"No I don't. Why would I?"

He shrugs. "I don't know... I just remembered it seemed *really*

important. You were all serious about it and everything.."

"Was.. I?" Joko mumbles wearily. Travis nods, and Techno just remains silent.

"Yeah! But you can't remember, which is really weird... Does that mean you also don't remember dropping your shoe off the cliff?"

Joko blinks, hands sweating as panic begins to arise in his chest. "My... shoe..?

"Uh huh," Travis nods again skeptically. "You were balancing it on your head, and it fell off. It fell right off and into the water — *Gone.* In fact... Joko... How are you wearing shoes on you right now?"

Joko looks down to his feet, noticing he's wearing a pair of dark red sneakers. Travis starts to back away from him, fear beginning to cloud his eyes.

"T-That's really suspicious of you..." he gulps. "I.. I don't know if I can trust you anymore, Joko..."

"What?" he exclaims, "N-No, of course you can trust..!"

"Then where did you get those shoes from? You told me you only had one pair! What's going on? Are you trying to trick me? Please, *just tell me the truth!!"*

Momentarily filled with trepidation, Joko stammers.

".. O-Okay, okay. Fine," he surrenders to Travis' comments. "You got me. You're absolutely right, Travis. I.. I do remember. You see, I balance things on my head when I get.. really *stressed.* And when I.. I dropped my shoe earlier in the water, like you saw, I climbed down when you weren't looking and got it back. See? I'm wearing it now. You can trust me, Travis—"

"He's a scam!" Techno yowls with his face still planted in the dirt. He takes this as a chance to try kick his way free from Joko. Joko yells, pinning Techno with both his arms now.

"*TRAVIS, HURRY UP AND KILL HIM."* Techno thrashes with his legs from under's Joko's irresistible grasps. But without his arms, his forces are practically futile.

Travis only nods, pulling the pistol he has out from his holster. As Joko commands, Travis walks over towards Techno as he raises his grip on his gun.

*Is this it? Is this where I die?*

No, it can't be the end. He doesn't have a dead end..

*.. But that doesn't mean it won't show up at the last second.*

"Now's your *fucking chance!"* Joko shrieks out again, "before I lose him!"

Travis closes his eyes.

He holds the gun to Techno's head, putting his finger on the trigger.

Techno's eyes grow wide, watching in both fear and anticipation.

But Travis doesn't shoot him.

Instead, he turns his gun around.

"I lied. It never fell into the water." He laughs. "I was bluffing."

"... What?"

And he points the gun at Joko's head instead as he whispers with a demand colder than Joko's apathetic soul himself:

*"Now get the hell out of Joko."*

# ➳ CHAPTER 33: YTZK.

***[ when you see // = play music. dont stop until chapter ends :) its much better to read with the music on ]***

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***TRAVIS***

*"Get the hell out of Joko."*

A relentless wrath interweaves with his words as he spits out each of them. The innocence evaporates from his eyes, replaced with a deathly glare.

Joko freezes under the boy's stare, feeling the metal muzzle of the gun jab into his forehead as his mask sticks onto his sweat-coated face.

*If this works, then he'll be hesitant and I'll know for a fact that I am right...*

"Wh... What are you.. Talking about?" Joko mumbles, laughing nervously. "Are you okay, Tra—"

"Shut up! I know you aren't Joko!" Travis threatens, raising his voice, "you're someone else. *Now get out of him before I shoot."*

*"Are you out of your mind?!"* Joko exclaims, *"I am Joko!"*

*"Oh really?"* he asserts, "then take off your mask then. Take it off if you're *so certain."*

Joko stops as he hears this, and Travis knows now that he's caught him. He smirks tauntingly as he sees that Joko is not answering.

This only confirms his—

"Fine."

The smile disappears almost immediately from Travis' face. Wait, is he wrong about this..?

*I hope not.. I don't want to look like an idiot.*

Joko puts a hand to his mask, slowly pulling it off his face as Travis is revealed a pink-blonde haired boy. His eyes flutter open from behind his mask; a pair of vigilant and glowing red eyes stare back at Travis. It takes him a minute to realise.

*That's not him.*

He starts to piece together why Joko had taken off his mask so calmly. He must have thought that Travis had never *seen* his face. But he's wrong.

Because he has seen his face - *Once.*

The night where he had witnessed Joko crying in the bathroom — He remembers it all like the back of his head.

*' When Joko slowly took off his mask at the bathroom sink, it was the first time Travis was able to have an almost clear glimpse of his face. Behind the mask was the face of a boy with bright,* ***blue*** *eyes. '*

He remembers the way his cyan pools reflected a glossy glassiness as it spilt tears of his heartache. He remembers seeing the way his bloodshot, blue eyes darted left to right to make sure he was really alone.

He remembers the vulnerability Joko had shown that night. How the only way he could be able to take on the burden of his grief was to be alone. A man who's afraid about showing his weakness is a man who has been damaged to such an extent that he can no longer trust anybody.

He's torn inside. Behind that mask was the face of a boy who had endured a solitude type of pain that had shattered his heart. A type of guilt he cannot ever fix.

And he stayed with Joko because he wanted to help fix him.

But he doesn't want to be his dog. He doesn't want to be his puppeteer. He just wants to help *him.*

And as he stares at Joko's eyes, he's overcome with an uneasy gut-feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"You can't trick me! Not this time," Travis yells, "bring back Joko *right now, whoever you are!* I- I will to shoot you if you don't!"

He cocks the gun one last time, standing confidently by what he commands; Joko's unwavering stare does not leave him. Techno still lays on the ground, trying to pick at his cuffs.

Joko breaks the still atmosphere, giving Travis one last solid stare before throwing his hands up.

"Fine, fine, you win I guess," he confesses, taking a step back. His arms drop to his sides, and his eyes roll to the back of his head; a shadowy, human-formed cloud of mist emerges out from inside of Joko's chest, and the boy collapses unconscious to the ground. Travis yelps out in shock, stumbling back. Technoblade spins around, lying on his back now as he's free from Joko's grasp.

"*H-HEH? What?!"* Techno utters, watching as the spiritual figure hovers above the masked boy's body.

"Yeah, you're right. Good job Travis. You ruined everything," the figure claps his hands sarcastically, muttering. He looks like he wants to die right now.

"Hold on," Technoblade points out, flicking his hair to get rid of the dirt on his face. "You're one of God's assistants! Y... Yimf?"

"Wrong, it's Yetz." YTZk frowns. "Y-T-Z-K. The K is silent."

The silhouette body then begins to slowly merge into vague

characteristics of a human being. His hair begins to become distinguishable from his shadow — and the two are able to see some faint features of clothing on him.

"You have hair now?" Techno nods his head at him, completely dismissing the fact that Yetz had just possessed a player.

"Oh yeah," Yetz ruffles a hand in his hair. "When I'm on Earth, I slowly start to take some resemblance of my human form."

He points to the ground he's hovering above. "As soon as I touch this, I'm human again."

The assistant then turns over to Travis.

"Now you.." Confusion eases its way through his skeptical voice. "*How* did you know I possessed him? I thought there would be no way of you knowing. I even got his personality right and everything! And you figured it out because of a *shoe?"*

Travis, still slightly stunned by it all, shakes his head quickly to snap back to reality. He takes a good look at the assistant.

Something about Yetz' thick accent seems familiar to Travis, so he makes sure to keep that in mind as he answers his question.

"Well, it's more than just a shoe," Travis raises a finger. "I figured it out with a few reasons and by the help of God."

*"What?"*

"The night before, I had an encounter with God." Travis smiles, "he told me to keep an extremely close eye on Joko because he won't be himself. I didn't really get what he meant at first, and things felt normal until after the whole shoe thing this morning. I got this weird gut feeling. So I decided to test something.

'I asked you to hold my hand, and you did. But Joko would *never* hold my hand. You know why?"

"Why?" they both ask.

"Because a few days ago before, I remember asking you the same question since I felt scared — If you could hold my hand. Maybe Joko could have been in a bad mood, but I remember him snapping at me and telling me that the only hand he'll ever hold is his girlfriend's once he gets out of here. And he seemed really serious, too. So when you held my hand, I have to admit that I found that kinda weird!"

Even though Yetz' facial features are not visible, Travis can feel him shoot an *'are-you-serious?'* look.

"But obviously, that's not enough," Travis continues. "So to really set things in stone.. I decided to bluff about the shoe incident to see if you'd fall for it. If you really *were* Joko, then you'd see through my lie straight away! *And you didn't!* And to top that off, I know Joko's eye's are *blue,* not red."

Yet'z mouth is hanging open as he hears Travis talk; Techno isn't

usually surprised, but he has to admit that this is one of the only times he's felt genuinely shocked. He didn't expect Travis to be so... *Perceptive.* That can explain why he's ranked 4 in intelligence.

"Well, I told you everything I know. So at least tell me what *you're* doing!"

Yetz blinks. "I'm trying to do us a favour."

Travis takes another look at the assistant. Why does he feel familiar? The answer is on the tip of his tongue. He knows it.

Technoblade's phone suddenly buzzes, and the cuffed boy tries to reach for his pocket to grab it.

Then suddenly, Yetz floats down onto the ground to reach for Techno's phone. As his left foot comes in contact with Earth, he begins to take the shape of his human form.

His hair fades from a dark grey to brown; his mesmerising, red iris' swirl into a latte-beige as his grey eye-mask is lifted up from covering his face.

He walks over to Technoblade, kicking his phone which is already partially hanging from his pocket.

*Wait..*

"Dead end, see?" Yetz says, bending down to show Technoblade the screen.

In bold letters, the screen says it: ***DEAD END.***

"You're gonna die."

Techno's eyes grow wide, and Yetz turns back to Travis.

"Alright, so what you did there was kinda impressive. But let's just forget this ever happened, and you can shoot this guy. Let's just do that and then I'll tell you everything and I'll leave. Okay?"

Travis steps back from him slowly.

"Wait a minute..." Travis says, "I.. I think I know you from somewhere."

"You.. do?" Yetz swallows nervously. "Uh, I mean, no you don't. Wait, weren't your memories... E... Er... How.. How do you say *'effacé' in english?"*

"You're not fluent in English?" Techno asks, and Travis gasps realising he's probably made the biggest discovery this entire game.

"Hold on!" His heart skips a beat as he exclaims, pointing at Yetz. "Of course he's not! Because...

Because he's the french man I saw at the bakery..!

*A6D!"*

Just like that, Yetz' cover is blown.

- - -

"Oh fuck." Is all he says.

"That explains how you knew about the game back at that cafe!" Travis declares. "It all makes sense, now! That's what God meant..

Wait.. *Then what were you doing inside of Joko's body?!"*

Yetz stares blankly at him for a second, unsure of how to respond.

A small gasp from behind him attracts his attention, and he notices Technoblade has managed to slip out from his handcuffs. Before he can jump to his two feet, Yetz snaps to his senses. In a flash, his body distorts; twirling as he submerges back into his ghost form, flying up. He shoots his hand at Techno, closing his palm into a fist as a black aura coils around Techno's body, pinning him to the ground as he cries out.

"Look, I don't have much time left here!" the man alerts, ignoring Travis' remark as he around to him. "I need you to hurry up and kill him now while I have him down!"

"Wait, what?"

Yetz holds out his other hand, levitating Travis' handgun from the floor; now, both his hands are in use.

"I'll tell you everything if you just kill him now!" he commands, "I'm keeping him pinned down for you!"

"No, stop! Why would I listen to—"

"*Just fucking do it, hurry!"*

"*No!*"

Travis knocks the levitating gun onto the floor. "Not unless you—!"

"Oh, you really want to play it this way?" A6D spits. "Fine! We'll do it! *I'll kill you both then!"*

He spins around, and flies and takes over Joko's fallen body. The boy's eyes snap open almost instantly. The aura that was halting Technoblade vanquishes, and he's released from being frozen once again. Stumbling up, he tries to regain his balance as he watches Yetz/Joko stand up, throwing a powerful fist at Travis' side jaw — A punch that's much stronger than Yetz' physical human strength. That's one of the advantages of possessing a player with stats higher than yours. Travis trips over, and Yetz grabs the gun from the floor.

"If you're not going to do it," A6D hisses, turning to Technoblade; aiming the pistol at the boy who's standing only a few meters ahead. "Then *I fucking will!"*

*Brûle en l'enfer, Technoblade.*

And he pulls the trigger, sending the bullet flying towards Techno's heart.

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***TECHNOBLADE***

His life is flashing before his eyes; and suddenly, the world starts to turn much slower. Like as if God had pressed the slow-down button on a universal remote.

*DEAD END.*
*DEAD END.*
*DEAD END.*

The words ring in his ears as he's frozen still. And this time, it's out of his own reflex.

He finds himself shutting his eyes tightly, trying to differentiate his fast-paced spinning mind to the slowed-pace churning world.

A loud gunshot bursts into his field of hearing, followed by a choir of high-frequency whizzing.

It feels like forever passes.

But he cannot feel anything.

He puts a hand to his chest, feeling for any blood. There isn't any.

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***TRAVIS***

Travis falls to the floor as he's shot in the chest, saving Technoblade from the bullet that would cost him his very life.

He feels the side of his body slam into the ground, but his body is too numb to even send it's pain signals up his nerves. His vision is blurry, but it's visible enough to see Technoblade kneel over him. A pair of warm arms wrap around him, picking him up.

With an empty, dull expression on Techno's face, he starts to yell something at Travis.

*What are you saying Techno?*

Unable to hear, he narrows his eyes, trying to lip-read Technoblade:

*' W H Y - D I D - Y O U - S A V E - M E - T R A V I S? '*

A small, sad smile curves on his lips.

*Why did I save you?*

*I saved you because. You are my friend.*

He wants to talk, but he can't. He can't talk.

He feels Technoblade put his hand in his.

Things start to fade away. Why are things starting to fade?

His heart falls into an abyss as he feels the heavy burden of his regrets lift itself up from his shoulders.

He cannot hear, anymore.

He cannot see, anymore.

He cannot talk, anymore.

He can only feel. He can only feel the terrifying arms of death wrap itself around him.

It's black. Everything is black.

*I don't want to go yet.*

Slowly, he stops feeling. And he lets Death's arms finally take him away.

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Travis?"

Techno shakes the boy, whose laying still on the floor as the last of his life seeps away from within him. His voice tightens in his clasped throat, feeling Travis' body go rigid and cold in his arms.

Is Travis really...?

There's another buzz on his phone.

***USER 12** HAS BEEN SHOT BY **USER 13.***

*USER 12 HAS REACHED A **DEAD END.***

Travis broke from his future to save Technoblade's.

He feels something ache inside his chest; a burning pain tugging at his heart as he reads those words.

A single, solemn drop of tear rolls down his cheek.

"Wait, shit," A6D frowns, as he escapes from Joko's body. Dropping the gun, he reverts back to his hovering, spiritual form. "I wasn't meant.. I didn't—"

He's interjected by the sound of a very familiar voice from behind.

*"Woah, woah, woah!"*

Techno and YTZk turn around, and they see a man cloaked in dark, sinister clothing appear out of nowhere.

It's God — and he's waving his arms to pause the two boys in their tracks.

"*What's going on here?"*

With a finger, he removes half of the mask from his face, revealing his left eye glowing an eye-bleeding crimson red; his cold stare burns like a laser into A6D's very soul.

"Do you care to explain yourself, *Yetz*?"

Yetz freezes in his tracks.

"I.. I.." he stammers. God walks up to him, raising his voice as he yells.

"You *know* possession is strictly against the law, right?!" He booms, the vexation in his voice roaring with fury. "I don't like getting serious here, but you just broke the first rule of the Scripts!"

Techno lays Travis down onto the ground with both arms, drawing his attention to God, who is now standing in front of them

yelling. This is the first time Techno had ever seen this side of God.

It may also be the first time he's ever actually felt afraid of him.

"*You know the consequences of breaking that rule! Why did you do it?"*

A6D is quiet.

"Don't think I haven't *seen* you messing around with the game. You've possessed multiple people. So why. Why did you do it? *Answer me."*

A6D's voice cracks, and he stifles back a cry with his hands.

*"*Because... I don't want you to leave," he cries, "I don't want you to make.. To make *him* God! I don't want you to let anyone become God! You know you'll die, right?! You'll be gone if you give away your title!"

God lowers his tone. "... Well you know. You're going to be the one that's gone now, right?"

"No, please, please God. Please don't let me die, *please don't banish me!"*

A6D's anguished cries of mercy tear through the air as he begs. "*You can't do this!* We've known each other ever since we were humans! *We've been the trio even after we all died!"*

"I have to do it," God whispers. "I don't have a choice. It's either you, or the world."

"N-No!" Yetz screams, "I promise I won't do it again! Please don't do it! *I don't want to go—!!"*

His voice is silenced as God puts a hand to his chest. A red cloud of mist begins to swirl around A6D, distorting his cries for leniencey.

*"Goodbye, Vincent."*

- - -

He lowers his arm as A6D diminishes into specks of flying ashes. God readjusts the mask over his face again, and he's quiet for a few still minutes; his rigid body looks like it's forcing itself to be content, but even Techno can notice his slightly quivering bod. Eventually, he speaks up again, clearing his throat as he looks down to avoid eye contact.

"I wasn't planning on doing this yet, but..." he starts, "Travis' death was unfair. On all of our behalf's. So I'm going to even things out a bit."

Hearing his name sends another shock wave through his nerves, and he grinds his teeth as he shoots a spiteful stare at God.

"*What could you possibly do that will make things fair?"*

God twists his head to look at Joko, whose laying unconscious on the floor. He opens his palm, flicking his gloved hand; Joko's body

flies up and shoots across the sky.

"Since he's been possessed, he'll be out cold for a bit. It's only fair that I separate him from you."

He takes a step toward Techno, whose still kneeling down over Travis' body. God bends down, putting a hand on Travis' forehead. Travis' body radiates a white aura, before dissipating into thin air.

"What did you do to Travis?" Technoblade exclaims.

God looks up at him.

"I'm going to give him revival."

He stands up, brushing off his long, black cloak.

"It'll take a bit, but in Earth time the Choosing will only be a minute or so. If he chooses to revive someone else, the revived player will return back at the same place they died."

He gives a small wave to Techno. "I'm going now, bye," he says, and then he disappears, leaving Technoblade kneeling by himself surrounded in his own thoughts and a pool of blood.

He's zoned out, gazing at his hands which are bruised by the metal cuffs and plastered with dried blood. His head aches from the overwhelming things that have just happened in this short timespan, and he shuts his eyes tight to try recollect his thoughts.

Travis has revival.

*Travis can come back again.*

Vague, distant memories of himself and Travis when they first met replay in his head.

Memories so faint they seem almost like a dream — visions of himself laughing with him. Smiling with him. Fighting with him.

Where did it go?

His emotions — the last of what he's able to really feel — it all seems so disconnected, now. Like a deep void in his heart, he can't remember how it feels to love; to cry; to care. He knows something is wrong now. Something is wrong with him.

It's not Travis, or Schlatt, or time that's changed. It's *him.* Something happened to *him* and that's why he can't feel human anymore.

Maybe Travis is the only way for him to become Human again. If he could just come back again, for a second chance, maybe he can...

His phone buzzes.

It must be revival. Travis has chosen.

He checks it, praying that for the first time in his life he's chosen to be selfish.

***USER 12** HAS UNLOCKED REVIVAL*

*USER 12 HAS CHOSEN **A PLAYER** TO BRING BACK*

. . .

***USER 11 - CSCOOP - HAS BEEN REVIVED***

# ➳ CHAPTER 34: how could you let him die, daddy?

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***NUMBER 11 — COOPER***

His heart rips in half, watching the screen in horror as Travis' demise is sealed.

"No! Travis, *no!"* he cries, clasping a hand to his mouth, jotting up from his seat. He feels a hand rest on his shoulder, and it calms him down a little.

"It's okay, Cooper." Wilbur tells him with a gentle tone in voice, ushering him to sit back down. "He'll be joining us, remember? We should be proud, the kid lasted a long time out there."

The other deceased players in the Dead People Hangout nod in agreement, except SneegSnag.

"I'm just wondering how *that* guy outlasted a *pirate*."

"Shut the fuck up Sneeg," Poke comments.

Cooper slowly sits back down in his seat, clenching strands of his dirty blonde hair in his hands.

"That's not fair, god dammit! *It wasn't hit fault he died!"*

He feels like bursting into tears, but he doesn't want to make a fool of himself— so instead, he bites his lip. After all, Travis would be joining them soon.

Wilbur puts a comforting arm around him, reassuring him that it will be okay.

The Dead People Hangout is a void the dead were forced to stay until the game ends. It consists of a large, plain round dark wood table (which sat low to the floor under a light source you couldn't see) a few couches with pillows of their numbers, and a large TV screen. The Dead cannot eat, or sleep, or feel any physical pain.

Ultimately, they *are* dead.

They take the shape of their regular human form, however the scars from their deaths are engraved into their bodies.

At the other side of the room, is a large door. It can only ever be opened from the outside, and it's where the new dead are introduced.

In other words, it opens every time a new player dies.

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door. Everybody turns to their

attention to the door, waiting for Travis to walk in.
Slowly, the it creaks open; a bright ray of white light seeps through the crevices of the opening door. In emerges a small boy with dog-like ears, and a dirty pink sweater painted with blood.

Cooper stands up from his seat, unable to take his gaze away from Travis. It's been so long, since he's seen him.

The boy smiles at him.

And Cooper runs faster than he's ever ran before, colliding into Travis as he wraps his arms tightly around his reunited friend.

"Travis, I hate you so much," he laughs, tears pouring down his cheeks as his head rests on his shoulders. He doesn't know whether he should feel happy or devastated.
"You shouldn't be here, I wanted you to win."

Travis hugs him back, unable to help the large smile stretch along his face. His eyes flutter shut, spilling of salt tears as he laughs with him. "I- I missed you so much, Coop."

"I missed you too," Cooper's cries, stifling his wracks into half-sobs, and half-laughs. Finally seeing him face-to-face again after all this time couldn't possibly make him happier.

But it also means that he couldn't make it. And the thought of Travis being dead with him sets a hole in his vacant heart.

His shoulders shake as he cries in his shoulders, and the two bask in each others companionship for a few moments, before Cooper finally pulls away.
"You did so well out there bud," he smiles, wiping his bloodshot eyes. "You did so much better than all of us. I'm.. *I'm proud."*

Travis smiles back, his own face blotchy and red from crying. He opens his mouth to say something, but is interrupted as God's unexpected presence walks in through the door behind them.

"Actually, it's not over just yet!" God claps his hands. His voice seems slightly less hyperactive then usual - kind of melancholic, in an odd way.
A few of the players shoot God confused glances, while others question him.

"Wait, what?" Cooper utters.

God just clicks his fingers, and all at once, everything disappears.

In the blink of an eye, Cooper finds himself standing on top of a podium. He realises quickly that everybody else who's also dead are also standing at their own — Wait a minute, this is the God Encounter zone.

He looks beside him, but Travis isn't there. In fact, Travis is actually standing on a hovering platform in the centre of all the

podiums, holding some sort of staff. Connected to his platform, are 15 translucent bridges, all joining to each of the podiums.

"Congratulations Travis!" God's voice exclaims throughout the hall, though he is nowhere to be seen. "You've unlocked Revival! Meaning you have the choice to either revive yourself, or revive somebody else of your choosing. If you choose to revive yourself, you can drop the staff to the floor. If you choose to revive a player, you must cross the bridge and appoint the staff to whom you wish to bring back. Take your time."

Travis' eyes grow wide, and he looks to be in a mixture of panic, fear, and confusion. He mumbles something to himself under his breath, and he looks around. He looks back down again, submerging into deep thought. Of course, Cooper understands why.

If he was just told he had the power to bring back someone from the dead, he wouldn't exactly enthusiastically seize the opportunity right there and then either.

The Encounter Stadium falls silent, and the only sounds Cooper can hear is the thudding of his own heartbeat. Just watching Travis is making him sweat, and God forbid him imagining how it would feel like to be in Travis' shoes right now.

Time passes for what seems like hours to him — not that there isn't really such thing as 'time' where they are.

Until finally, the tense suspense hanging in the void breaks. Travis sucks in a deep breath, tightening his grip on the staff, which suggests that he does not show any intention in dropping it.He looks around. And he doesn't stop looking until his gaze reaches Cooper's.

*Oh, no.*

*Don't. Don't do it.*

Travis starts toward the bridge leading to Cooper.

"Travis, no!" Cooper argues quickly, "revive yourself! Drop the staff!"

"Hey," God snaps. "Shut up idiot, it's his choice."

Cooper ignores him. "Travis, turn around! It's okay, I don't want to-"

Travis starts to run along the bridge, not. "I'm choosing you, whether you like it or not."

Cooper backs away, not that it matters since else he'll fall off the podium. Or maybe falling off wasn't a bad option...

Travis stops walking, now standing only a couple of feet in front of him. Cooper shakes his head slowly, and he feels his voice break as he speaks:

"You can't do this, Travis. You.. You deserve a second chance, not me," Cooper whispers.

"I won't be able to make it if I go," Travis says to him, and he holds out his hand in the form of a fist.
"I believe in you Coop. Win for me. Go win for me, okay?"

He swallows, and nods, still teary-eyed. He raises his hand, and fist-bumps him.
.. *Okay, then.*
"I will."

Travis gives him one last smile of good luck before casting the staff down to his shoulder.

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His eyes snap open, and he's breathing shakily.

"Holy shit," he exclaims out of breath, and he takes a look around him. He's laying on top of a massive pile of burnt rubble coated with charcoal.

*Oh yeah, this the hospital I died in.*

It was a funny thought, because it's not every day you die and come back to life. A wave of memories wash over him as he stumbles up to his two feet.

He didn't *want* to be revived, but there's not much he can do about it now. He has to take this chance while he has it, and make the most of it. Travis entrusted him with this change — Not anyone else. *Him.*

It's so hard to believe that only a couple of weeks ago, he was exploring this place with Technoblade and Travis.
Speaking of Technoblade, he's not sure how to feel about him.

He may have been dead, but that doesn't mean he hasn't been watching. Truth be told, Cooper doesn't trust the guy. Something happened to him — *corrupted* him. He's convinced that it's either God's doing, or Technoblade finally snapping into his senses. Either way, he does not seem as loyal as he used to be.

But if Travis gave up his life to save him, he has to put his faith in Travis to trust what he did was the right thing to do. Killing Techno wouldn't be what Travis wanted.

And if he's not going to win, he wants to make sure he at leasts lives the right way. It's his last chance of living — and he's not intending on living it the same way he did before.

Before, he was always afraid; he grew an immediate disliking towards Technoblade because he couldn't bring himself to put his trust in him. He was irrational, too. He had always jumped to conclusions without thinking of why, or what the consequence would be. *That's* why he died.

So this time, he's going to be the opposite. He's going to do what

*Travis* would want, not him — a tribute to his death, in a way. And that's to rebuild the alliance he's had with Techno.

He jumps over the crumbled piles of collapsed infrastructure, walking out until he reaches the beginning of the forest. Once he makes it out, he takes a random stroll through the forest.

But on the other hand, there *is* a man he doesn't trust for a fact: And that's Jschlatt.

He always held a suspicion towards the guy, and after watching how he had almost shot Techno that night a while ago, he had a sneaking belief that the guy would turn his back on Techno at some point or another. Come to think of it, Technoblade doesn't even know about that, doesn't he?

He should probably tell him that some time soon.

Cooper walks aimlessly through the forest for a bit, unsure of where he should go. He checks his phone; another wave of nostalgia hits him. All of his previous messages are still there, even from a month ago. He scrolls to see his most recent one:

*' ALWAYS '*

While the situation he was in was one of the most terrifying experiences of his life, reading the message gives him an almost *warm* feeling inside of him. A wistful memory setting his new friendship in stone. Not that it lasted long.

The feeling of it all still feels so surreal to him — How he's actually *alive* again. Because god damn, did he miss the taste of eating corn chips and Technoblade's homemade peanut butter sandwiches.

As he's walking, Cooper hears a rustle in the bushes, followed by a man grunting.

"Fuck, fuck, ow! I should have worn those steel-toe timber boots when I had the fucking chance! *OH SHIT!"*

Cooper stops, crouching low behind a tree. There's no *way* he imagined that - it was definitely someone alright.

There's another sudden rustle in the distance, followed by the sounds of something heavy tumbling down a hill. Cooper peaks his head out from the tree.

"Whose th—?"

A man flies into him, knocking him over to the ground. He yelps, struggling from underneath the man.

"*ARGH,"* the man groans, rolling off of him. Cooper shoots up.

"What the hell du...?"

His voice trails off as he takes another better glance at the man; he's wearing a suit, holding his foot in his hands as it streams of blood.

Cooper looks down and sees some of his pants stained by his

blood.

Oh yeah, he forgot he watched Jschlatt shoot his foot with a gun.

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***DIARY USER 13 — JOKO***

*Where.. Am I?*

He rubs his eyes groggily, opening them steadily, only to find himself staring up at a ceiling of clouds and slightly tinted dark blue sky.

He props his elbows on the grass ground, and pushes himself up. He's leaning against a tree, sitting in the middle of a vast, spacious valley.

Joko groans, trying to recall the past events. It takes him a few moments, until finally he navigates his way back into the reality of things once again. That's right, his body had been taken over.

It all started at some point in the morning. He didn't really know what went on inside him at first, but it was like watching a movie — you see it all happen in front of you, but you have no control over what happens. It was like he had been caged in his own head, forced to watch the world collapse into ruins before his eyes.

*"How could you let him die, daddy?"*

He jumps at the sudden voice, and turns his head to identify the victim. There, standing a few meters ahead of him, is a little green creature with long, thick strands of pink and blonde hair.

"Who..." Joko starts, "Wh.. What are you?"

*"We are Goobers!"*

He doesn't say anything. He doesn't know *what* to say.

*"Daddy, you killed a man. You're a murderer."*

He turns around, and sees another Goober standing beside him, glaring at him with big, accusing eyes.

"N.. No," Joko stammers, scooting back from the creature. "I didn't kill Travis."

*"Yes you did, you killed him. And you killed other people too, daddy. Why did you kill Ted? Why did you kill Wilbur Soot? I don't understand.."*

He shakes his head, eyes growing wide. He feels a tap on his head and sees another 'goober' sitting on his shoulder.

*"Don't listen to him daddy. You didn't have a choice, it's not your fault."*

He jumps back, falling to the floor.

*"It's all your fault,"* says another goober, appearing on his other shoulder.

"Stop!" He exclaims, trying to swat the creature away. But to his

horror, his hand goes right through them, like a ghost almost. "Stop talking. Stop talking, all of you stop talking."

*"You are a coward, daddy, you should have gotten rid of him. Why did you have to trick him to thinking he should be your friend?"*

Joko grips a hand to his head, feeling his own throat itch with a rawness. The voices of the creatures echo in his mind, all arguing with each other like a broken harmony.

*"You tricked a human. You are a liar, daddy."*
*"Don't worry, it will be okay daddy."*
*"Why did you manipulate them?"*
*"Isn't killing wrong?"*

"Stop!" He yells out again, standing up on his feet now as he holds his head with both hands. His eyes begin to sting of tears. "*Please stop talking!"*

*"You are evil."*
*"It's not you fault."*
*"You have to keep fighting for her."*
*"You should hate yourself, daddy."*

"*STOP!"* He shrieks, turning around as he breaks into a sprint, running along the seemingly endless valley.

*PLEASE STOP, PLEASE STOP TALKING. STOP TALKING, STOP TALKING.*

He runs, and he runs, and he doesn't stop. The melodies of the goobers begin to distance themselves from him, but that doesn't mean they'll catch up.

Long, sharp blades of grass prick at his legs as he races through the fields.

He then trips over a log, and falls flat down on his face. But instead of pushing himself back up, he just stays there. And he curls into a ball, pulling his legs up to his chest as he breaks into sobs.

# ➳ CHAPTER 35: that's how I exploded

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***DIARY USER 9 — RYAN***

A week has passed of Ryan staying with Ty in his house. During this time, the window to Ty's bedroom had been repaired. As for progress — there wasn't much made. In fact, things had been a little *too* quiet since he had stayed with Ty. *Too* quiet.

It's about 6:00pm, and the two boys are playing Portal 2 on Ty's console on his bed.

"5 more minutes!" Ty's mother calls from outside the room. "Make sure you're ready!"

Ty looks down, taking his eyes off the screen to instead have another look at his outfit. He's wearing a casual shirt, tracksuit jacket and dress pants.

"This is fine for a restaurant, right?" He mumbles, still looking down. Tonight, Ty and his family were planning on going out for the night.

But Ryan doesn't respond, his sight is glued to nothing in particular. Ty gives him a worried glance, waving his hand in front of him.

"Hey, dude. You okay?"

Ryan blinks, shaking his head. "Oh, yeah. I'm good, don't worry."

"You kinda just zoned out there for a sec," Ty frowns, pausing the video game. "If you don't wanna play, you can just tell me. Actually, I'm starting to get bored too - we've been playing for *hours!"*

Ryan chuckles a little. "Well when you're in the middle of the Hunger Games, video games can never *not* be fun."

"Well, I have to leave soon anyway," Ty says, getting up from the bed. "Remember, you can do anything as long as if you don't make too big of a mess. We have 2-minute noodles in the cupboard, and we'll be coming back maybe in 2-3 hours. Make sure you're inside by then."

The etching smile on Ryan's face slowly contracts, morphing into a frown. There's actually something he's been meaning to tell him for a while, and tonight is probably the best chance. Ryan swallows back the anxiety piling up in his throat.

"Actually, about that..."

Ty tilts his head. "Yeah?"

Ryan breathes out. "I've been thinking.. *It's time for me to go."*

"Good one," Ty laughs, but quiets down after realising that Ryan's not joking. "... Wait, you're serious?"

He nods.

*"But why?!* We've been doing just fine here! Nobody has tried to kill us!"

"Exactly! That's the point!" Ryan puts down his controller, shooting him a sombre glare. "Absolutely *nothing* has happened — not on my side, anyway. I mean, don't you find it a *little* suspicious how nobody is coming after me? Besides, it's only a matter of time before your mom finds out about me being here. I can't stay here forever, Ty."

Ty falls silent, left speechless against his argument. Ryan glances back at the door, and then lowers his voice down a little as he speaks softly.

"I think it's best - for the both of us - if I left tonight."

The boy's eyes grow, his body shifting rigid in disbelief. "Tonight? B-But.. Your injuries..—"

"No, look," Ryan says, lifting up the grey shirt he's wearing that Ty lent him, "I'm almost fully healed now, see? It's gonna leave a scar, but for the record I'm okay. I'm in good enough condition to fight."

The word slides uneasily off his tongue. *Fight.* He dreads ever doing it, but he knows that sooner or later it's going to happen.

Ty doesn't say anything. Putting a hand down, Ryan pushes himself up from the bed, inching closer to Ty as he puts both his hands on his shoulders.

"Ty," he says, his sapphire eye trailing down to meet the boy's. "... *Thank you.* Thank you so much. For everything. I don't know if I would still be alive if it weren't for you. And.. You've really made my time here seem less of a hell. You're probably one of the best things that have happened to me."

And he means it from the bottom of his heart. Before the game, Ryan had no idea how it felt like to be *normal.* To be human. To have *hope*. Meeting Altrive made him realise how it feels like to truly have a friend — to have somebody who always had their faith in him.

And Ty; meeting Ty had made him understand how there was always a bright side to look at even in the darkest of times. Nothing he can do could possibly ever make up for the kindness Ty had shown him.

The corners of Ty's eyes begin to sting with water, and he bites his bottom lip, responding by pulling Ryan into a tight, wistful

embrace.

*"You can't go."*

His cry is muffled in Ryan's shoulder. "I'm coming with you, remember? I have.. To..."

"You can't, you know that," Ryan says, feeling his own voice break, "You know you can't come with me. There's no way, you'll be in danger."

*God, we've known each other for a week. Why am I so attached to him?*

"Ty! We're leaving now!" His mother suddenly calls from outside his room. Immediately, Ty pulls away. He clears his raw throat, mustering up the strength to call out to his mom without making it seem like he was just crying.

"Coming!"

Torn, Ty gives Ryan one last, sad look.

"Don't leave, *please."* He chokes out, before turning around and running out his bedroom door.

Ryan stands there, and a few minutes pass before he hears the front door shut.

Springing into action, Ryan rushes to Ty's wardrobe, and pulls out his dark blue hood; ripping off his shirt, he slides on his hood. The blood had been completely bleached off thanks to Dr. Halo.

He darts over to Ty's desk, hurriedly opening his drawers until he finally gets his hands on a pen and crumpled- up, empty scrap piece of paper. He clicks the retractable ballpoint, scribbling down:

The pen drops from his hands after he finishes signing off, and then he grabs his backpack from the floor — All that's there is his gun, and a spare shirt. He opens the door of Ty's bedroom, feeling a gust of cool air hit his face. Ryan quickly runs to the kitchen, and shoves in a few packets of chips and other snacks.

*Am I forgetting something? I don't think so...*

Once he's finished with that, he makes his way over to the front door, which was thankfully able to be unlocked from inside.

He raises a hand to the doorknob, but hesitates. Does he really want to leave him behind...?

... No, he has to. For Ty's safety.

He turns the doorknob, and he feels his heart shatter as he pulls open the door.

But what he doesn't realise is that he *is* in fact forgetting something.

**Because his phone is still sitting on Ty's bed.**

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After finally making it out the skyscraper, Ryan sets out into the real world once again after what feels like years. He feels a warm, reassuring light radiate onto his face as the sun sets slowly, tucking

itself behind the buildings in the distance. As he runs, to wherever the pathway up ahead guides him, his surroundings tint a tranquil, honey glow.

After about ten minutes of running along aimlessly through the streets, he reaches the beginning of a forest.

With the sun fully set now, the moon's arrival begins to dawn over the now-night sky, it's moonlight cracking through the crevices of the arched forest's trees. Ryan stops for a minute to take in the sight of his unusually beautiful surroundings, which almost allows him to forget about the stress of it all.

And then, he proceeds to run through the crowd of trees.

Running and running as fast as his legs can carry him, his breath runs ragged and hot as he sprints in various directions. Running along a narrow, dirt pathway which is raised a meter or so in the air, he remembers: He should probably check his phone! He almost forgot about that.

Stopping to a halt, he jumps down from the small pathway and onto the forest ground. He slings off his bag and digs around his...

*Oh no.*

He can't find it anywhere. He stands up, numb from bewilderment.

Did he really..?

"Fuck!" he then yells, kicking a tree. "I fucking forgot my phone! Oh my god, *I'm so stupid!"*

How could he have forgotten the most important thing he needed to survive?! Without his phone, he has no way of telling the future or keeping safe! And he's too far into the forest to even remember his way back.

He really screwed up this time.

A twig suddenly hits him in the back of his head, snapping him out from his train of regretful thoughts.

"Yeah, you are pretty stupid."

He whips around, and sees none other than Ty, leaning against a tree on the pathway above, waving a phone — *his* phone — in his hands. Wait, what's Ty doing here? He must have ran away from home and tracked him down with his phone.

Ryan can't help but let the thankful smile creep its way onto his face.

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***DIARY USER 15 — JSCHLATT***

The adrenaline pumping through his system from the battle he had earlier with Joko has dissipated now; numbness worn off, the

unbearable pain of shooting his own foot surges up his nerves.

A pained groan escapes from his mouth as he rolls off the blonde boy and onto the floor, shutting his eyes tightly.

"What the hell du...?" The boy's voice trails off, and he blinks. "Oh, you must be.. Jschlatt?"

He opens an eye, taking another look at the unfamiliar voice.

*How does he know my name?*

The blonde's hand is in his back pocket, seemingly hesitating to pull out something. But instead, he drops his hand to his side, and moves closer to Schlatt.

"Your foot is bleeding."

He grinds his teeth, barely managing to spit as his hands grip tightly around his shoe; "*Yeah, thanks for the observation, Mr-Fucking-Obvious."*

Cornell blood immediately sticks to and paints his palms as he rips off his shoe. His sock is a damp red. He seethes again between chattering teeth, holding back another agonised yell. He looks back to the boy, but finds that he's gone.

"What help you were," he mutters to himself, tearing off his sock. He grimaces at the bullet wound as he ties it tightly around his foot to try ease the blood loss.

The burning, stinging pain stabs in his ankle again, and blood slowly starts to seep through the sock, making him wince. But it's enough to keep in the blood... Right?

... Is this the end? Is he just going to be left alone here, bleed out and *die?*

*I can't die yet. I still have dreams that I want to achieve in the future.*

He looks up at the sky, and only just realises it's nighttime. The day had felt like it had gone so quick — yet, so slow;

*Time moves fast. But the world sure as hell doesn't.*

Looking up at the moon through the trees above, he tries to seek for reassurance. For tranquility. For peace.

"I don't want to die yet!" he cries. "God, don't let me die! Shooting myself in the fucking foot was a stupid mistake on my behalf, I take all the blame! *Just please don't let it end here—!"*

His somewhat overly-exaggerated begs are cut off by being splashed on the foot with ice cold water. The pain melts away from his foot, numbing his nerves for a little. He looks up.

It's the blonde boy, and he's holding a small, drenched cap which was used to pour water onto his foot.

"Calm your tits, a shot to the foot won't kill you unless you don't get treatment." Blonde rolls his eyes, shaking off the remaining droplets of water from his hat. "You and Techno stole a bunch of medical equipment anyway. I think you guys left it back at that

mountain place you were before. But you'll be fine."

Schlatt blinks, narrowing his eyes. *"How the fuck do you know that?"*

His vision is now properly adjusting to the darkness of his surroundings rather than the pain in his foot, he sees the boy's features much more visibly now — dirty, ruffled blonde hair; raven-black clothes; and the entire side of his face is smeared with black... *Charcoal?* Actually, he looks like he just been to WWII. Or WWIII, if Mirai SMP counts.

He eyes him up and down. "The fuck happened to you?"

"Oh, nothing much." Blonde shrugs. "Just got blown up and killed. That's all."

A few seconds pass before Schlatt manages to process this. Wait a minute.. This guy isn't just some random. He's from the *game* — hell, when he reached to his pocket before, he was probably contemplating on killing him. The memories of him are finally coming back, now.

"*You* got revival?" Schlatt utters, almost in an accusing manner. "But weren't you like the second guy to die?"

"Third, I think. But yeah, that's me. Name's Cooper, the guy who exploded."

He reaches out his hand, but then retracts it back quickly after seeing Schlatt's is covered with his own blood. If his foot wasn't pouring out a truck ton of blood, he would've looked like he killed someone.

*Cooper.* After hearing the name, Schlatt's able to recall some of the past memories. He was the guy who used to be allied with Technoblade — *Way* back at the beginning of the game.

"Well, hey Cooper." Schlatt greets, looking at him. "They call me PvP God. So don't pull any bullshit on me or my foot right now is going to be your head."

Despite it sounding like a threat, there's something about his remark that seems sarcastic. Maybe it's the fact that Schlatt hasn't gotten any kills. Cooper finds himself smiling a little.

"Mind if I—"

"Greetings mere mortal! I just finished watching a man get possessed and my live saved *again!"*

Cooper and Schlatt spin around, and they see a tall figure cloaked in a dark red hoodie with a sheathed sword jumping down from behind a set of bushes and trees. He's holding a backpack over his shoulder.

"As Sun Tzu would say, 'Sometimes, we need to lose smaller battles to win the war'. I *will* defeat Joko next time, and when I do —"

He stops talking as his gaze locks in with Cooper. Baffled, his backpack falls off his shoulder. Cooper too, is silent in shock. Then, something Schlatt would have *never* thought he'd ask slides out of Techno's mouth:

*"Do you forgive me?"*

Schlatt looks over to Cooper, whose left silent against this.
He purses his lips, and after a few moments he speaks. "Travis sacrificed himself to save you. And he chose to bring me back instead. I don't want to waste this life holding any grudges."

Technoblade nods slowly.. Wait, hold on.

*Travis **sacrifised** himself?* Did Schlatt really miss *that* much out?

"Woah wait, Travis did *what?"* he blurts out.

"Killed himself to save me." Techno answers gravely, picking up his bag and walking over to the two boys, dumping it besides Schlatt. "I don't know *why* he would do that since we're enemies, but he did. Here Schlatt, you should probably fix yourself up."

Schlatt complies, and he rips open the bag, emptying it out. A bunch of medical gear falls out of the bag, and he hears Cooper face palm himself from behind as he sits down beside Schlatt.

"Damn, if that hospital didn't explode and bake my backpack, I would have had heaps of first-aid shit."

"You can thank Ant and Sparklez for that." Techno also sits down.

"Oh don't worry, I did."

"Hey," Schlatt comments, whilst in the middle of patching up his wound. "What exactly *did* you guys do before you.. Well, *died?"*

Techno looks at Cooper, and the two shoot a little mischievous grin. Schlatt mentally braces himself for a long story.

Cooper shuffles closer, and he explains the entire story; from when he first met Techno, to the moments they shared (which Schlatt had envied how social Techno was with them), and finally — to the hospital. Throughout the story, Techno would hop in and make some comments of his own, and Schlatt would make an ironic joke every now and then. Something about hearing others recall their memories had made Schlatt feel like he wasn't alone — it reminds him that there are other people in this world who are human too.

After all, he had always felt alone. Scamming people in his previous life only brought him temporary joy — but solitude as a long-term feeling. A weirdly warm feeling fills Schlatt, even in spite of having a painful injury.

"So that's how I fucking exploded," Cooper finishes, "because this dumbass here didn't want me to know that the door was a trap."

"He didn't want you to know that the ***door*** was a ***trap****?"* Schlatt exclaims dramatically, "Technoblade. I didn't know you were into

those sort of things."

"Shut up," Techno laughs.

"I'm not shutting up, you're the one who used to watch people *brutally* get murdered as a full-time hobby. At this point, I really cant expect anything less!"

Cooper raises his hands, stopping the two arguing. "Okay, okay! I'll rephrase that! What I was *meant* to say was Techno left me to die like the fucking ape he is!"

He's smiling as he says this.

"Actually, what if I told you that was all part of my master plan?" Techno grins, raising an eyebrow as he folds his arms heroically. "I knew you would be revived, that's why I left you. That's right, I am God now."

"They actually call me Jesus H Christ," Schlatt speaks up. "My power surpasses yours."

"Nonsense," Techno exclaims whole-heartedly. "I am immortal. If you wish to defeat me, *train for another 300 years!"*

"They also actually call me Gandhi, God of War."

Cooper starts laughing as he says that, mainly because Schlatt's struggling to open a small bottle of antiseptic as he says that.

"You doing okay there, *Gandhi?"* He asks, and Techno smiles at his suffering.

He manages to open the lid. "Yeah, I don't know what the fuck this bottle is because the labels are in fucking spanish or something, but I'm putting it on my foot."

"Wanna bet that he's gonna scream in the next 5 seconds?" Techno smirks at Cooper.

"Deal. If you're right you can keep my cap."

"Don't make deals you know you're gonna lose, *Blade,"* Schlatt comments, opening the lid to whatever the bottle he has in his hands. "I'm not going to*AAAARRGHHHHH!"*

Cooper reluctantly hands Techno his hat.

"Big ego for someone with a height of 5'0" Techno scoffs.

"I'm not 5'0, shut the fuck up." Schlatt snaps, chucking the bottle as he wraps his foot in bandages. "That was part of *my master plan, anyway*. Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak. Confidence is key."

Techno starts laughing.

"First Gandhi, then Jesus H Christ. Is Sun Tzu gonna be next added to your list?"

*"They call me Art of War, Technoblade,"* Schlatt coos in a menacing tone, before the three burst into laughter.

God, he doesn't know how long it's been since he had laughed with Techno.

He looks at Cooper, whose laying on his back, chuckling.

And before he knows it, the three end up talking to each other for almost the rest of the night — almost as if they were at a camp. It was a moment he believed was impossible to happen given their circumstances.

Something had made Technoblade lose his humanity, for what Schlatt feared would be forever. But maybe there's a way he can gain it back — a power that can make him *human once again.*

And maybe.

Just *maybe*.

Cooper holds that power.

# ➳ CHAPTER 36: something bad might happen

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*PREVIOUSLY ON MIRAI SMP...*

Ty tilts his head. "Yeah?"

Ryan breathes out. "I've been thinking.. *It's time for me to go."*

"Fuck!" he then yells, kicking a tree. "I fucking forgot my phone! Oh my god, *I'm so stupid!"*

A twig suddenly hits him in the back of his head, snapping him out from his train of regretful thoughts.

"Yeah, you are pretty stupid."

"Oh, you must be.. Jschlatt?"

"*You* got revival?" Schlatt utters, almost in an accusing manner. "But weren't you like the second guy to die?"

"Third, I think. But yeah, that's me. Name's Cooper, the guy who exploded."

Maybe. Just *Maybe. Cooper holds that power.*

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***TECHNOBLADE***

Something inside of his brain slowly starts to unlace and rewire itself; like a knot of cords being untangled to insert into the correct inputs. His beating headache returns to him, awakening him from his semi-consciousness slumber.

A day had passed since his reunion with Cooper. The three had talked what felt like almost the entire night, chatting simply about their life, jokes, etc.

He learnt that Cooper used to skateboard at stunt shows with his friends, and how they'd always go to the skate ramps after school to mess around and record 'dumb youtube vlogs'. He actually also won several skateboarding competition awards, which he seemed pretty proud of that night.

And for Schlatt, he learnt that he and Connor used to be middle school friends before they thought about running a small business. Connor's uncle moved in for a week once, and left a bunch of cool-looking merch hats from a band he was in, so as a joke, the two started a "Schlatt n Co" "business" at their school, and they'd make kids pay them $20 for a "hat that can raise their IQ by 15".

He also opened up about the fact that even out of school, he had the.. Infamous reputation of scamming and ripping people off. But even for Schlatt, he still seemed hesitant on telling the group about his life.

But as for Techno *himself* — he found that he hasn't really told them much about his life other than the things they already know; which is the fact that he used to work in McDonalds before being randomly hired to help out in a hitman organazation.

Though he didn't *intentionally* mean to be secretive — because more or less, it's mainly since he actually..

Well. *Doesn't remember.*

For some reason, he can't seem to recall his past. He can't seem to recall his parents; or his siblings, if he ever had any, that is. A sinking feeling dropped in his stomach as he was trying to recollect his history the other night. All he really can remember is that he worked in a fast-food joint and lived alone. Could this game have somehow messed with his head?

No, there's no way that he was dosed with amnesia before the game had started. Everyone else seems to remember their past — so why can't he? It's as if he had always been a 17 year old.

After the discussion they had that night, it was another day of work. The group decided to start venturing out to find a place to camp at. Techno insisted to go hunt, but the majority vote was to spend the day resting. So they just aimlessly wandered around the forest to collect resources to camp out for the night.

And soon, evening had fallen onto the darkening skies above them; and now, they're asleep. Techno dozed off, until he was woken up by the consciousness of his own brain.

He feels something changing in his mind; quickly, he brings a hand up to his forehead as his head begins to pound within his skull. The thudding headache returns back to him, this time jabbing harder into his head. A groan slips out from his mouth between clenched teeth.

He opens his eyes, and sees Cooper asleep beside the fire a few meters in front of him. *Cooper.*

Ever since Cooper had joined, it's as if something deep down in him has changed. He feels more... *Free*. Of what, he doesn't know. But for as long as he can remember in this game, his mind had been set on hunting with Schlatt for more kills. But now, it seems like for the first time, he's not focused on that anymore. He's been able to experience something he hasn't felt for a long time.

Joy, perhaps. Or more broader — *feeling.* He doesn't feel so numb anymore, like he used to be.

Head on his side, his eyes flutter down to the floor, and a wave of

memories wash over him; memories of Connor's and Travis' death. A feeling that feels foreign to him pulls at his heart, and his throat tightens.

*They didn't deserve it. They didn't deserve to die. Not like that. Not like that at all.*

He puts both hands on his face, feeling the tears he's been holding back fall one by one down his face. A muffled sob escapes from his mouth, and he clasps it quickly.

"Techno?"

A voice sounds from behind him. He feels a hand place itself on his shoulder, and turning around slowly, he sees that Jschlatt is awake.

"You alright? You sound like you're.. in pain."

He blinks back the surprise drawn along his face as he sees Techno's tear-stained eyes. Whatever response he is expecting, Techno knows he sure wasn't expecting *this.*

His friends had died. *His friends died right before his eyes* — and he had felt *nothing of it.* Until now, when it's all coming back to bite him in the butt.

But something about the way the tears are spilling down from his eyes gives him a refreshing feeling — like sticking your head out the car window when you drive. He feels alive. No, he feels *human.* Like a part of him that he's longed to have has come back; even if it's only a small fraction of what he's missing, *something's back.*

"Yeah, I am in pain." Techno smiles, wiping his face, his gaze meeting with Schlatt's concerned. "But I'm okay."

He puts his hand over Schlatt's as it's resting on his shoulder. And he squeezes it.

"I'm sorry. For everything," Techno whispers. Schlatt blinks, frozen and quite shocked at hearing the words come from his mouth. But nonetheless, he squeezes back, allowing himself to crack a relieved smile of his own.

He doesn't have to say anything for Techno to know that he understands what he's meaning. Like as if he were looking through an open window to Techno's soul, Schlatt whispers back slowly, smiling softly.

"I accept your apology, Mr. Blade."

Schlatt understands, now. He understands now that Techno's repenting for all the deaths he had caused.

*He's not playing the bloodthirsty character he was before,* is what Schlatt thinks. *And he sure as hell isn't playing the pussy nerd he was before that, either. He's being himself. His* ***real*** *self.*

"What time is it?" Techno asks him, releasing his hand as he breaks the gaze with his friend.

"Do I look like a fucking clock to you, Techno?" Schlatt says jokingly, smirking as his tone lowers to avoid waking Cooper up.

"My bad, Ghandi," he smiles back, and feels the ground for his phone. Eventually, his fingers slide along the surface of it, and he turns it on. The two boys lean in to check the time.

2:00 AM.

"Oh shit, 2 already?"

"We should probably get some rest," Techno whispers to him.

"Fine by me," Schlatt yawns, falling back as he rolls over to his side, his back facing Techno from a few feet away. Techno lays down, his phone resting on his stomach as he stares up at the night sky with wide eyes. A minute of silence passes before he hears Schlatt murmur again.

*"I'm glad that you're finally back, Techno."*

- - -

He blinks, waking up to the sounds of birds chirping and morning light radiating along the surface of his face. He gets up, rubbing his eyes. Checking the time, he realises that it's 9 AM. Techno turns to Schlatt.

"So what are..."

His voice trails off as he realises that Schlatt isn't there. His phone suddenly buzzes from beside him, and he checks it. An uneasy feeling sets in his gut.

*PLAYERS NUMBER 11 AND 15 ARE AT A RIVER A FEW HUNDRED METRES AWAY TO YOUR NORTH.*
*THEY FOUND AN ABANDONED BOAT.*
*YOU SHOULD CHECK ON THEM AS SOON AS YOU CAN.*
***OR ELSE SOMETHING BAD MIGHT HAPPEN.***

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***NUMBER 13 — JOKO***

*"So are you gonna ask her out or what?"*

*His friend playfully nudged the side of his shoulder, snapping Joko out from his daze; he blinked sheepishly after realising that he had been staring at the girl for way too long.*

*The way her short, silky pink hair fell ever so graciously over her face as she leaned over her desk, scribbling in her notebook. Her plush, glossy lips pursed as her amber eyes would effortlessly trail the tip of her lead pencil.*

*Amanda.*

*She always had long, beautiful rose-coloured hair since junior year; until now, when she had gotten a haircut to shoulder-length. And Joko found himself constantly admiring her from afar.*

*He had always admired her, but today — She looked almost like an*

*entirely different person.*

*"What are you talking about?" he stuttered, cheeks flushing.*

*"C'mon, you know exactly what I'm talking about," his friend, Josh, smirked. "Amanda~"*

*"You've liked her for years, dude," Noah remarked, pressing the button on his pen, "and we're high schoolers now. Valentines is coming up in a few weeks so now's your chance."*

*His friend pushed him from his seat, making Joko stumble to his feet. They were right.*

*He'd been meaning to tell her this for a while, so now's his chance. Since their teacher was usually occupied on his laptop, he doubted he would care if Joko got out his seat, since a lot of the classmates did so anyway. But even so...*

*"I.. I can't." Joko stuttered. He must have caught her attention, because he saw Amanda's gaze break from her work to glance over at him. Panicking, he feels his body heat up and he does the only thing he could think of doing.*

*Run out the class.*

*- - -*

*'God, I'm so stupid. I can't believe I blew that. You're a fucking loser, Joko.'*

*It was the end of school, and as all the classes were let out, he mentally punched himself in the face. He had the perfect chance to ask her in class. So why the hell couldn't he? He envied the guys who had the balls to confess to their lovers.*

*As he walked out the entrance to the school, he heard someone call out from behind.*

*"I like your new shoes, Joko!"*

*He turned around, and saw Amanda running up behind him. His eyes grew wide. "Wait, you mean you actually noticed that?"*

*"Of course, hasn't anyone else?"*

*He laughed a little. "No."*

*"Oh," Amanda murmurs, but her smile made the awkwardness dissipate in the blink of an eye. "Well I guess that makes me the first, huh?"*

*The way she smiled made him feel a type of warmth inside he would never feel around anyone else; God, he wished he could tell her.*

*"Achievement unlocked by Amanda: Looking at someone's red sneakers."*

*She laughed, which made him smile. "You're funny. See you tomorrow, okay?"*

*His smile faded, and before he could say anything the girl waved him off, running off across the park ahead of them.*

*No. No, he couldn't let this moment slip away. Not again.*

*"Wait! Amanda..!"*

*He called out to her, running over to the girl as she turned around. As he ran into the park she was at, he doubled-over, out of breath. The girl tilted her head.*

*"Yeah, Joko?" she smiled at him. He swallowed nervously, wiping his blonde hair from his face.*

*"Do... Are.. Uh, I.." he began, "Valentines. Are you, uh, going with anyone?"*

*Amanda shook her head. "No, I'm not actually. Nobody really wants to go with me."*

*"Well in that case... Amanda." Joko said, locking his eyes with hers as they shimmered a crimson under the embrace of the sun. "... Would you like to go with me to the Valentines dance?"*

*Slowly, the girl's face lit up; and a big, wide smile spread across her face as she took his hand in her own.*

*"I would love to."*

"Amanda!" he gasps, lurching forward with trembling hands as he's startled awake. The strings to his heart pull as the word unconsciously slips out his mouth. He'd been trying all he could to forget about her.

But he can't. And it absolutely *breaks him.* It breaks him knowing that he may not ever see her again.

And it's not the thought of dying that he's afraid of — frankly, he doesn't care if he dies. But the thought that really, *truly does* terrify him is leaving her all alone.

After all, if it wouldn't be the first time that someone she held close to would disappear.

For a few days, Joko had found himself wandering in a desultory fashion. His entire plan has fallen apart. Now that Travis...

*How could God fucking let that happen? How could he just kill him like that?*

He may have been possessed; but God forbid that he remembered watching *everything happen* — it was like watching a movie that you have no control over.

He may have used Travis — *deceived* him, even. But nonetheless, seeing him die right before him by the hands of *himself* gave him an inevitable burden of guilt over his shoulders.

And for those few days now, he had been left feeling vacant and confused; Creatures of what he finally realised were figments of his own imagination personified into his trauma and regrets have haunted him for days, leaving him lost. But like as if remembering *her* again somehow fixed that vacantness in his heart, his gears snap into action once again.

He clenches his fist, getting up. His end goal has not changed since the beginning.

He has to keep fighting. He *will* keep fighting. For him. For her. For their future.

He knows what to do now.

And to achieve his final goal, he has to become God.

**Once and for all.**

**a/n:**

**sorry for the messy schedule recently!! I have exams going on atm so things have been pretty stressful, but I managed to get a chapter done :) by friday I'll be free of exams so my uploading schedule will be consistent again**

# ➳ CHAPTER 37: you're nothing but a scammer

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**NUMBER 15 — JSCHLATT**

"Is there a reason why you wanted to wake me up at 8 in the morning?"

He raises an eyebrow at Cooper, whose walking solemnly in front of him with his hands tucked into the pockets of his tracks. He's wearing a backpack.

Knocking over a swaying branch in the way, he turns around to look at Schlatt.

For a split second, Schlatt had seen something in his eyes — *something maniacal.* But it flickered away too quickly for him to fully recognise what had happened.

At first, he was quite suspicious of this unplanned venture — in fact, he had even considered that maybe Cooper was going to try kill him.

*But there's no way he would do that. He's just not that guy.*

"Well, yeah," Cooper shrugs, snapping Schlatt out from his thoughts. The man tilts his head, signalling for Cooper to elaborate.

"While we were exploring yesterday, I actually found something." Cooper explains, pointing to the pathway ahead of them through the forest. "A boat. The shit's probably been there for a good decade or so, but it seems fixable from what I saw. I forgot to tell you guys about it since I didn't really think much of it then. But now that I'm thinking about it, it would be pretty helpful having a boat, huh? So been thinking we should fix it."

He gives a playful smirk. "Plus, you're smart, so you probably know how to fix it."

Something doesn't sit right with Schlatt as he says this. He opens his mouth, planning on saying 'never in my life have I ever fixed a 10-year-old abandoned boat, Cooper,' but decides to rethink things.

If he wants to fix it, wouldn't it have been easier to just wake up Techno too? Why *him?*

"How come you didn't wake up Technoblade as well?"

"You know, I heard you guys last night, right?" Cooper says casually. "The dude was crying. I was gonna wake up and do

something but you seemed to have had it figured out, and I'd feel pretty shitty making him help us if he was depressed the other night. Give him a break, yeah?"

Schlatt nods. He *does* have a point. But he shouldn't let his guard down.

As the two boys walk, they reach an opening to the coast of a large river. Across the coast littered with dirt, sticks and bushes, there was an old and run-down boat tucked in between two trees. So Cooper was right — there really *was* a boat.

Cooper quickly rushes over to it, followed close behind by Schlatt; it's small engine at the back looks rusted, but operable. Same goes with the controls. It's small, but big enough to fit three people.

The only thing that seems to need fixing is the interior, which is dented with holes and cracks, albeit can be easily handled by a couple of planks. The two decide to split up and go find resources that could be used to patch up the damages. Cooper went left, while Schlatt went right; and around half an hour later, they both returned with plenty of supplies and got to work. As they returned back to the boat, Cooper opened his backpack and pulled out a long rope, before chucking it into the boat.

The two boys settled on repairing the boat on opposite ends — Cooper suggested he'll work on fixing the front deck, while Schlatt focused on filling in any holes on the behind. And things went smoothly for about twenty or so minutes.

Until Cooper fucked everything up.

As he lifts up a piece of plank, a boom erupts in his field of hearing. Schlatt feels his heart almost jump out his chest as the boat's engine abruptly roars to life, sending him falling down to the floor behind him.

"What the—?"

*"SHIT!!"* Cooper yells from the front, panicking as he's frantically pushing the controls at the front of the boat. "SCHLATT, HEL—!!"

The rest of his cry is cut off by the sounds of the engine as it erupts with another thunder, before accelerating forward with Cooper still inside. Thinking quick, Schlatt sees a bit of the rope they had from earlier hang out the side of the boat. He stumbles up, stretching out and grabbing the rope a split second before the boat accelerates faster. He manages to just barely pull himself up inside the watercraft before taking off.

Landing with a heavy thud onto the deck, he yells out as he tries to push himself up from the ground:

"Cooper! *Turn the damned thing off!"*

The boat races up ahead of the large river stream, out of control as it rocks violently from side-to-side.

"It's jammed! *I can't!!"* Cooper shouts back, trying to yank back the lever, but it doesn't budge.

It suddenly sways to the left, sending both Cooper and Schlatt rolling to hit the side ledge of the boat.

"I thought you said this was fixable!" Schlatt groans, the side of his body hitting the boat's wall as a bucket-load of water splashes over him.

"*I did!"*

"So why the *fuck* are we—?!"

He's intervened as the boat rocks again, sending them flying to the other side of the deck as they shriek out. As the boat drives up the river, an opening to the ocean emerges slowly.

With a shaking body, Schlatt grips onto the side, trying to heave himself up. But he slips, sending him falling face-first onto the floor again. He hears something crack in his face, and feels a small stream of blood dribble down from his nose to the plank deck below him. "Fuck."

He feels his stomach flip a million times as the boat vigorously tosses the two boys around, making him feel nauseous to his stomach.

Stretching an arm out, Schlatt clings onto the rails at the back to try regain his balance — he pinches his nose in an attempt to reduce the flowing blood pressure in his nasal vessels. Frantically, his sight darts back and forth — disregarding the fact that Cooper's leaning over the edge of the boat now, probably puking — his eyes lay upon the control panel.

With shaking legs, he stumbles over to it and grabs the lever, trying to jerk it down. It's not moving.

He tries again, with more force, pushing down on the lever.

*C'mon, c'mon, c'mon! C'mon, you useless piece of shit! Do your job!*

A pained groan slips from his mouth as he pushes — then all at once, the lever jolts down, stopping the boat entirely. In relief, he falls to his knees, out of breath.

"Thank.. God," he pants, half mumbling. With heavy legs, he stands up, taking a look around them.

The boat had stopped in the middle of the ocean — the land they came from before could fortunately be seen in the distance, but still is pretty far.

"Great," Schlatt sighs between breaths, trying to manoeuvre the broken lever. "We're in the middle of the ocean. And the boat's fucking broken."

He looks around the boat's floor as he asks Cooper:

"Does this thing have any spare paddles?"

While he already predicts that the answer would be 'no', he asks anyway. He awaits for Cooper's response — but he hears nothing.

"Cooper...?" Schlatt asks slowly, turning around to face the boy. Until suddenly, Cooper's hand shoots to his chest, pushing him up against the ledge of the boat.

*"Don't think I don't know."*

Cooper hisses at him out of nowhere, his eyes submerging into a frantic, glassy stare. He leans in close as he spits, temporarily sending Schlatt into a shocked trance. What was with Cooper's sudden change in behaviour?

"Woah, woah, calm down there bud," Schlatt laughs nervously, raising both his hands. "Don't think you don't know *what* now—?"

"About your *plans."* He spits, saliva spraying onto Schlatt's face. *"Your fucking plans.* I know you're up to something."

*Plans?*

Schlatt gulps, the fearful energy radiating from Cooper piercing through to his heart. He truly doesn't know what on Earth he's talking about.

He doesn't have *any* plan.

"I have no idea what you're—"

"Just because I've been dead doesn't mean I'm oblivious!" Cooper snaps, pushing him harder now. "I've watched everything — I've *seen* everything. And I've seen you try to kill him. *That night, dosing the motherfucker with anaesthetic. I've seen you try to kill Technoblade."*

And just like that, he feels his heart rise and catch in the middle of his throat. Memories he's tried so hard to forget — being kept lingering at the back of his mind — wash over him, returning back into his consciousness. All the while proving that he really *can't* forget what he had done that night.

That day he met Technoblade, was the same day his phone had announced the Bounty. After hearing about there being a way for him to finally be set *free* of the game, he couldn't help but allow the irrational hunger of his own greed take over him.

He regrets it all — he regrets ever even *considering* picking up the gun. And while he'll be forever grateful he never killed him, the constant guilt of attempting to *kill him* has *never, ever left him.*

But he doesn't want to be like that, anymore. He doesn't want to subject himself to be blinded by his own greed again. He wants to leave that all behind.

Because throughout this game, he had found himself developing an unlikely friendship with the man.

A friendship he does not want to break again.

"No, I don't want to kill him. Coop, you gotta believe me. I- I'm

not planning anything. I'm a changed man, I swear. I-"

"And you expect *me* to believe that?"

He laughs mockingly, before averting to his ice stare once again. "You're a deceiver, Schlatt. A scammer. You've been a *liar* your whole life. All you *know* is lying. You're using him as your body guard, cruising through until you two are in the end game. And then bang, you're going to kill him when he expects it the least."

*What? No. That's not what I want.*

He knows that in the end, he'll either die or become God. That'll mean he have to kill him, right?

But he can't. He can't kill him.

"Travis gave up his life to save Technoblade," Cooper continues, "and if keeping him from being killed by someone like you is what Travis would have wanted, then I'm not gonna hesitate to fucking kill you on the spot right now."

He glares at him for a few moments, before lowering his tone in voice, sounding menacing as he speaks.

"I know your entire game plan. And wanna know something else, too? I've never once trusted you, not fucking once. You're the last person I'd *ever* trust."

His words penetrate right through to his heart, as his mind replays those words over and over, like echoes bouncing off from walls.

*'You're the last person I'd ever trust.'*

All those conversations they had for the past few days... Was it all a lie? Is this how he really thought of him all along? Was this Cooper's plan?

Had he brought him out here to tell him this?

"But what about everything that happened the past few nights?" Schlatt says, "don't tell me.."

"Listen here." Cooper seethes, giving him a small shove against the boat's gunwale, almost making Schlatt fall over and off the boat. "Travis revived *me* — Out of everyone he could have chosen including himself, he fucking chose to bring back *me!* If you thought I was coming back into this game just for some small-talk to you and allow my trust to easily be put into *your hands* then you're fucking mistaken. I don't trust you one bit, Schlatt. And I'm not going to let my gullibility and cowardliness be the death of me again."

Out of nowhere, he suddenly feels a burst of what he can only define as anger surge up from inside his chest.

"You're saying *you* can't trust *me?!* You woke me up at 8 in the morning, made me help you fix this piece of shit boat and lead me out into the middle of the fucking ocean and *you're telling* ***me*** *that*

***I'm** suspicious?!"*

As he yells in exasperation, throws a fist in Cooper's face, which is seemingly the only way he can express his frustration.

"Pinning the blame on me isn't being a fucking coward, Cooper! It's being an *asshole!"*

Quick to respond, Cooper fights back, also slamming a fist into Schlatt's lower jaw. "Shut the fuck up! *You're nothing but a scammer!"*

"What did you just say?" Schlatt shouts, stumbling back from the forceful punch.

"I said you're nothing *but a fucking scammer."*

The blonde kicks him as he shrieks, making Schlatt fall to the floor.

Like setting off a ticking time bomb, Schlatt's eyes dart to the first thing he can use as a physical comeback. The rope he used to climb onto the boat is sprawled out along the floor beside him. Hurriedly, he grabs the rope, crawling up as he holds the object out like as if he were holding a belt, shooting it towards Cooper's neck.

"*Take that back you son of a bitch!!"* he shrieks, pushing him back until Cooper's body slams into the ledge on the other side — now their positions have been switched.

"*No, I won't!"* Cooper yells back, *"Because yo—"*

But he's not able to finish his sentence, as he's pushed over the ledge of the boat by Schlatt. Before he lands into the water, he grabs the rope Schlatt's holding, pulling him down with him.

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*SPLASH!*

Within moments, the two boys fall into the water, fighting against the force of both the sea and each other's power. Head bobbing down underwater, Schlatt thrashes for his life as he emerges back up, sucking in one breath air before being pulled down by Cooper again.

Heart racing as his supply of oxygen slowly draining; his veins pumping with blood as it runs cold in his veins; the impact of hitting the water is dense and forceful as he's pulled down by Cooper, whose also fighting. Sinking, Schlatt tightens his grip on the rope as he swims down to Cooper, choking him by the neck as it wraps around him.

With a firm hand, Cooper reaches out and grabs at a handful of Schlatt's hair, pulling him as he screams underwater.

A shriek followed by a burst of bubbles escape from Schlatt's mouth. His head is empty of thought as he convulses; he doesn't know what he's doing anymore. He wants to swim up and breathe,

but his channeling anger is overtaking his usual common sense.

Already submerged halfway down the ocean, his energy starts to wear out as water starts to enter through to his lungs.

Cooper's hand shoots to his neck, and he coughs out — making him inhale a bucket load of water. He's about to fight back, when suddenly a burst of pain shoots up from his foot, making him yell out in agony through the water. And then he remembers - *his foot.* He can't move it at all, now.

It's like it's completely broken.

When he had shot his foot a few days ago, he used antiseptic and some other weird chemicals to help ease the pain. It worked. Until now - because whatever he added must have been some sort of chemical that reacts to water.

His grip on the rope loosens, and Cooper's leg flies up to hit him once more. Already unable to move his foot, he finds himself hopelessly sinking in the water.

*No. No, I can't die. I'm not letting him kill me.*

*"I'M NOT LETTING YOU FUCKING KILL ME!"*

His screams are inaudible through the water as it tears raw from his throat. His arms are the only operable part of his body he can move anymore.

Using the last of his strength to jerk at the rope tied around the boy's neck, he yanks it up. Cooper's eyes grow wide, and both his hands grip tight at the rope around his neck as he desperately tries to pull it off. He sinks down, trashing and writhing under the hold of the rope.

A few seconds pass of watching Cooper struggle, until he notices that the bubbles coming from his mouth and nose disappear.

And then he stops.

He stops moving.

The adrenaline Schlatt once had now is beginning to dissolve into drowsiness as he's fighting against Cooper. Arms flailing fatiguely through the water, and consciousness slowly draining from the lack of air, Schlatt finds himself running out of breath to hold.

*But I'm not going to stop. I'm never going to stop until death shows himself to my face and takes me with his own bare fucking hands.*

He yells out again, however significantly more weaker as he swallows more water. Pulling the rope harder than he's ever had, he sinks down and pushes him down further into the depths of the ocean.

And just like that, the last of his energy disappears — replaced by a blurring of his peripheral vision.

*Air.. I need... Air..*

He tries to look up, but everything now is a blur. Incapable of using his legs, swimming up is useless.
His eyes sting with salt water, and his lungs are begging desperately for oxygen.

Everything around him begins to fade. But a split second before he loses his consciousness completely, he feels a pair of hands grab his arms.

✧ ✖ ✧

Gurgling noises splutter out from his mouth as he sucks in a giant breath of air — his head finally bobbing above the surface of the water. His soaked, brown hair sticks to his forehead as he falls into a fit of coughs, feeling himself being pulled through the water by somebody.

Weakly, he opens an eye, and sees Technoblade holding him by the arm as he swims through the water to shore.

"Hang on there," Techno pants, as water flies in all directions as he swims. Schlatt doesn't answer.
The crashing of the waves and ringing in his ears from the pressure of the water is all he hears.

Finally, he's thrown onto the surface of land. Techno, who had saved his life by jumping into the water and swimming to save him, crawls onto the shore, slumping down onto the sand as he inhales breaths of oxygen.

"What the hell... Happened... Over there?" Techno asks him between rasp coughs, catching his breath.

"Co...oper.." Schlatt gasps, out of breath as he tries to cough out all the water inside his lungs. "Wh.. Where's Cooper?!"

"I don't know, I couldn't see him," Techno replies. "I only just barely managed.. To get you."

A dreadful silence fills the atmosphere, as Schlatt slowly starts to realise.

*... I killed him, didn't I?*

*I killed Cooper.*

He takes a few seconds to process this. He had just killed a man. *With his own bare hands.*

Shutting his eyes tight, he recalls what had happened — recalls what Cooper had told him.

*... He's right.*

*Changed man or not, you'll always be a scammer. A fucking scammer. That's all you'll ever fucking be, Schlatt.*

And for the first time, he doesn't care about surviving anymore.

Choking on water, he turns around and crawls onto his knees, wishing that he could have been the one dead instead.

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# ➳ CHAPTER 38: it's okay, coopie

***[ play the music all the way through for better effect :) ]***
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**NUMBER 11 — COOPER**
**DAYS PRIOR**

*"God?"*

*He wakes up, and finds himself in the God Encounter Hall. God's sitting on a throne, watching him with cold eyes behind his mask.*

*"Yo Cooper," God waves. Cooper frowns.*

*"What do you want?"*

*"I think the question is more so, what do* you *want?" God finger guns him, but his grin is quickly replaced by an unsure frown. "Wait, no, I mean what* you *want — no, I mean you* want *something, I don't want anything. Wait, that doesn't make sense either- what* you *do wh- Okay, whatever, you're confusing me. I'm confusing myself!"*

*He jumps up from his seat on the throne, pulling out a small letter from his pocket as he clears his throat.*

*"You're here because Travis wants me to send you a message from him."*

*Cooper feels his heart skip a beat.*

*God clears his throat, holding the paper up to his face as he reads out loud, silencing Cooper:*

*" 'Hi Coopie. I really hope God gave you this message (which I am). I just want you to know that I have faith in you. It wasn't just a last minute choice, either. I've been planning this for a while now. When I used to be alive, I knew I was going to die. I thought if by the off-chance I ever got revival, I'd revive you. Not only because you're my friend, but because maybe you could bring together Team Make-A-Wish.*

*I know I'm gone, but you still have Techno. If you could just... Bring him to the end with you, maybe you'll have a chance. Stick with him, OK Coop?*

*I know he's not in the best state of mind but maybe you could help bring him back.*

*You can do this, I believe in you. —From, Trav.' "*

*God gives the letter to Cooper to let him read for himself — and he was right. Everything God had said was what was written on the note.*

*"Travis insisted on me giving it to you in the Dead Hangout."*

*As Cooper's eyes trail the words, he murmurs softly to himself.*

*"Bring back.. Team Make-A-Wish..?"*

*'... It's been so long since I've heard that.'*

*"Now that you've heard him, you're gonna hear what I have to say," God says solemnly, circling around the boy. "I know I'm meant to be unbiased, but I can't help but feel sorry for how pathetic you are. So I'm going to give you a little advice."*

*"And what's that?" Cooper mumbles, dropping the note.*

*"Schlatt can't be trusted." God remarks. "But you knew that already, didn't you? So get rid of him as soon as you can. If you want to fulfil Travis' promise, you'll have to get rid of him now. He's tried to kill Techno once before, and that bitch will do it again. He's your biggest obstacle — Not #9, not #13, not even #1. User #15 — get rid of him, and you'll be able to make Travis proud."*

*He thinks about this.*

*God's right, isn't he? Of course Schlatt can't be trusted. Getting rid of him was absolutely necessary. But now? Can't he wait a little longer?*

*"There's an abandoned boat near your vicinity," God continues, grinning, "I put that there on purpose in case it ever had to be used by a player. Does it work? I'll let you figure that out."*

*A boat...?*

*A boat.. What could he do with a boat..?*

*Suddenly, an idea comes into Cooper's mind.*

*What if he were to lure Schlatt with him to the boat, and perhaps kickstart the engine? He'll have to check if the boat really does work though. Maybe if he could get him and Schlatt out into the ocean without making it seem like a set up, he could use that chance to surprise attack him? Pushing him into the water... Or even the engine, if it comes down to it...*

*But the real question is.. Does he* really *want to do that?*

*To kill someone?*

*"Let me get this straight.." Cooper holds both his hands up. "Killing Schlatt is what Travis wants?"*

*God nods.*

*Cooper bites his lip, looking down. "... If it's what Travis wants..."*

*He clenches his fist beside him, and his gaze follows up to God's. "Then I'll do it."*

*God smiles. "Well I'll let you figure out a plan. Shouldn't be hard. Anyways, that it. Next time you see me, you'll either be dead or be God. Bye!"*

*Before he's able to say anything, he's sucked back into reality as he knows it — and gradually, the soft whimpers of Technoblade can be heard amidst the quiet night.*

*"You alright? You sound like you're in pain."*

*It's Schlatt. He can hear him whisper to Techno. Cooper holds his breath, not daring to look back — is he going to kill him? Is he finally going to turn his back on Technoblade and kill him like what God had said?*

*He slowly inches his hand towards the nearest object he can use as a weapon, which was a pocket knife.*

*"Yeah, I'm in pain. But I'm okay... I'm sorry. For everything."*

*Cooper freezes, clutching the knife in his hand with his back facing towards them; his head perked up, listening intently. But to his surprise, Schlatt doesn't hurt him.*

*Instead, the two boys go on murmuring to each other, probably thinking he was asleep. Cooper would join — but he can't.*

*After all, he needs as much rest as he can get before he can put his plan into action.*

And that's what had led him up to now — now, to his dying fate of falling like a complete fool into the water, being played by his own game.

Schlatt's hostile outburst was something he wasn't expecting, and neither was the choke-hold wrapping of the rope around his neck either.

He tries to fight against Schlatt's pull and the wrath of the rope around him, but it's futile. The more he struggles against the rope, the tighter it gets — until now, it's choking him by the neck, burning his throat.

He doesn't want to kill Schlatt, anymore. He just wants to survive.

He *has* to survive. For Travis.

Trying to pull away at the lash, he finds that his energy begins to drain fast. He's not going to die.. Right?

*Am I going to die?*

A choked, strained cry escapes from his tight throat, suffocating as he accidentally ingests the salt water. His vision above starts to cloud with darkness; and he feels his body grow cold.

...

*God?*

*God? Can I bring him back? Please. If I'm going to die, please just tell me. If I won, could I have brought him back? Could I have brought everyone back?*

A voice ever so faint speaks vaguely at the back of his mind, seemingly belonging to God.

*No. You wouldn't. You can't bring them back.*

In a more faint voice, God whispers again.

*Souls of the deceased will disappear once the game ends.*

As his remaining vision of the water and light begins to cloud with darkness, he closes his eyes, finally submitting to the hands of Death. A defeated smile cracks on the corners of his lips.

*... Of course.*

He's failed him. But in the end, what was it all for? To become God? What would it be for if he couldn't bring back Travis?

He wouldn't be able to see him again.

He feels the tips of his fingers grow numb; his body growing lighter; his consciousness beginning to slip away from his reach.

*I failed him. I failed Travis. I couldn't keep the promise we made.*

*I'm a failure. I was always a failure, and now...*

***Now I will die as a failure.***

He stops fighting against the pull of the rope, allowing the numbing fear of death overtake him.

He couldn't make Travis proud.

Suddenly, something warm embraces him reassuringly, easing him from his terror as he's knocked out from deep within his internal thoughts.

*'It's okay, Coopie.'* whispers a delicate voice into his ear. A voice he cannot see but can recognise with full certainty.

*'I will always be proud of you.'*

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***TECHNOBLADE***

"Schlatt?!" Techno yells, racing through the forest with his phone in hand. "Cooper?!"

After receiving the dreaded message on his phone, he didn't waste a second to bolt to his feet and try to find them. According to the message, they are near a lake.

*PLAYERS NUMBER 11 AND 15 ARE ON A BOAT OUT IN THE OCEAN WHICH CAN BE FOUND FOLLOWING THE LAKE.*
*LOCATION: 250M AWAY.*
*HOSTILITY: 70%*
*THEY ARE HAVING AN ARGUMENT.*
*IF NOTHING IS DONE, BOTH OF THEM WILL REACH A DEAD END.*

*They'll both die if I don't save them. What are they even doing? Why did this even happen?!*

The urgency to save them is all he's able to think of. Swatting the thick layers of branches and leaves out his way, he finds a river concealed between them — it must be the lake his diary said.

It's a wide, long stream, leading up north as the currents weaved between trees, around mounds, past bushes. Without hesitation, Techno kicks his foot out, sliding across the damp, muddy grass as he makes a turn towards the direction where the river was flowing. He retracts his leg, breaking off into another desperate sprint.

As he follows the forest's ever flowing lake, he's led out onto the shore of a beach that's overlaid with some of the forest further inland. The river then stops, replaced by the emergence of the sea.

His breathing is ragged as he runs out to the shore; his eyes darting left to right along the ocean, navigating the seas to find them — and then he does.

He narrows his eyes, looking out farther into the ocean, when his sight latches onto a frantically swaying boat. In the boat, are two boys fighting each other, quickly followed by both of them falling into the water. Techno's mind races as he watches in horror, momentarily paralysed. He has to save them.

"Always stick together." he murmurs subconsciously under his breath, breaking off into a powerful sprint as he leaps effortlessly into the ocean. Diving down, he kicks his legs as he swings his arm up, free-styling.

*We have to always stick together. That's what Cooper and Travis would have wanted.*

His head bobs up from the water as he sucks in a quick breath of air. Swimming desperately through the ferocious waves of the sea, water splashes over him.

*ALWAYS STICK TOGETHER.*

The words repeat themselves over and over again in his head, and he finds that it's all he's thinking of. Clenching his teeth together to withstand the cold water, he uses those three words as his fuel to drive him forward. Dipping up and down, powering like a motor through the water, he finally sees them enter his field of vision.

There, only a few meters ahead of him, he can see — Schlatt and Cooper, sinking down into the water, neither of them moving.

A long rope is tied around Cooper's neck as the boy floats down.

*Shit, shit, shit!*

Techno takes one last large inhale of air above the water, before diving down to try to catch them both. Swimming down to Cooper, he reaches out his hand; but the sea churns violently, sending him swirling in different directions. Frantically, he splashes around in the water, reaching out for Cooper.

*C'MON, COOPER. C'MON, DON'T DIE ON ME. GRAB MY HAND. C —*

Stretching out, he manages to just barely grab his hand; he yanks him up in the water as he tries to urgently swim up. But then he sees Schlatt sinking down, a few feet away from him, also unconscious.

*Dammit! They're both out! Am I too late?*

Grinding his teeth to stop them from chattering in the ice-cold water, he swims to him with one arm, trying to grab him. When he does, he tries to swim up — but his efforts are in vain, because he's dragged down by the two boys. There's no way he can lift both of them out.

No way in hell.

He gasps in exertion, swallowing a mouthful of water as his lungs beg for oxygen. His grip on Cooper slips, and the boy swiftly sinks down below him into the depths of the ocean.

*"NOOOOOOOO!"* he shrieks through the water, not thinking twice about how much the scream drained his air capacity. Confliction pounds within the walls of his head; one part of him is urging him to dive down and save Cooper.

But the other part of his head is screaming at him to swim up for air. Screaming at him that there's no point in trying to save him because if he does he'll die. He'll die with the two of them and lose everything.

Only mere seconds away from ending up dead, he tightens his clutch on Schlatt.

And he kicks up, taking him by the arms as he fights for air, leaving Cooper behind in the water.

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He inhales intensely, only just barely making it out the water before his organs gave out. But his adrenaline rush doesn't end here.

Arms already sore, he weakly throws Schlatt onto his back as he swims with everything he's got left to the shore. Once he makes it, he flops onto the shore, coughing the living daylights out of himself.

"What the hell... Happened.. Over there?" he turns to ask him between rasp coughs. Schlatt crawls onto his elbows, spluttering as he chokes on water.

*"Co... oper... Wh... Where's Cooper?!"*

*Crap.*

He left him behind. But it wasn't like he had any other choice. But he can't tell Schlatt that right now — who *knows* how he'll

react.

"I don't know, I couldn't see him," he lies, fearing that if he told him he purposely left Cooper . "I only just barely managed... To get you.."

Schlatt catching his breath, his phone buzzes in his pocket. He's forgotten it was in his pocket — and to his surprise, it still works. It must be waterproof.

*USER 11 DROWNED*

*USER 11 HAS REACHED **HIS 2ND DEAD END***

He blinks, re-reading the words over and over. It was expected - but to see it on the screen was a different story.

For a few seconds, they seem like nothing more than just normal text typed out on a phone screen. But then it hits him — like the words finally processed in his mind.

Cooper is dead.

He's dead *again*.

And for the same reason — because *he left him behind.*

He was selfish, *again*. Valuing his life over the people he swore to protect from day 1...

But maybe that's not a bad thing.

He doesn't feel the same agonising guilt he had felt when Cooper first died. In fact, he's not sure how he's feeling now. He can't pinpoint anything.

He glances at Schlatt after reading the message, watching as he crawls up to his knees, wiping his hair out his face.

"Schlatt." he repeats himself again, urging for a real answer. "What happened?"

Silence.

"How did he die?"

Schlatt looks up at him. Techno's luminous, crimson eyes lock in with his as he demands for an answer; a fearsome, penetrating glare burning into his. Schlatt swallows nervously, mustering up the courage to whisper softly.

"He fell off."

Schlatt looks down, murmuring. "Drowned before I could save him."

So Cooper accidentally killed himself?

*... No. That's not it.*

That's not true at all. Because Techno knows that in reality, the one who killed Cooper wasn't Cooper nor Schlatt.

It was *himself*.

His head suddenly starts to throb, and he groans as he's hit with another severe migraine.

There it is again — the two halves of his mind clashing and conflicting against each other. His *heart* wanting him to mourn for Cooper; to blame himself for being the *real* cause of Cooper's death, not Schlatt. The part of him wanting to feel *remorseful.*

But his *head* is telling him otherwise — his head is telling him to laugh at his stupidity of dying again. To glorify Cooper's cowardliness. After all, he's one step closer to gaining all the power he has in the world. Why would he care about a man he's only just met?

It's hurting even more, now. Stupid headache. Why now of all times? He puts a hand to his head, shutting his eyes tight.

Schlatt stumbles up to his feet after finally regaining his breath, swaying side-to-side. His phone buzzes in his pocket, which makes Techno surprised at how his seems to *also* be waterproof.

The man takes out his phone, and his eyes grow wide as he sees his message:

*YOUR CATCHPHRASE:*
*"WHAT'S POPPIN?"*

So he gets the credit for the kill after all.

Wait.. But how come his name didn't appear in the death message?

*But I killed him,* Schlatt realises, *I strangled him to death and let him drown. Why aren't I in death message?*

He turns to Technoblade, who's waiting for an answer on what Schlatt had seen. Until, that is, his phone also buzzes.

Technoblade looks down, and pulls out his phone.

Except however, this time it's a message directed at somebody he's *never* in his life even *heard* of before.

*TY, AKA 'IAMTY'*
*BORN ON JUNE 19TH, SANTIAGO, U.S*
*HE ENJOYS PLAYING VIDEO GAMES WITH HIS FRIENDS.*
*HIS DREAM IS TO BECOME A YOUTUBER WHEN HE GETS OLDER SO HE CAN INSPIRE OTHERS JUST LIKE HOW HE WAS INSPIRED.*
*HIS PARENTS ARE SUPPORTIVE OF HIS GOALS.*
*HE WILL DO ANYTHING HE CAN TO HELP SOMEBODY.*
*WHETHER IT'S A FRIEND OR* ***A STRANGER.***
*BUT IN THE END,* ***HE'S JUST A KID.***

# ➳ CHAPTER 39: operation: technoplane

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***NUMBER 9 — RYAN***

"I still can't believe you really followed me out here."

Ryan's unsure whether he should feel relieved or terrified. It's morning, and the two boys are venturing out through the forests. Ryan's wearing his usual blue, short-sleeved hood with a black longe-sleeved T-Shirt underneath, whilst carrying a backpack slung over his shoulder; and Ty's wearing a pink hoodie with a white bandana tied around his head.

"Well I had to. You left your phone at *my* apartment!" he exclaims half-heartedly. "Isn't your phone kinda your lifeline in this game?"

"Well.. Yeah," Ryan admits, "but you didn't have to choose to follow me even after giving it back."

"I had to walk a long way from home, you know. No way I'd go back. I'd be lost."

Something about this snaps something inside Ryan's mind — grinding a little on his nerves. He likes Ty. He likes Ty a little too much — and he wants to protect him. He wants him to be as safe as he can — and he can't afford to lose another close friend. Not by his own hands.

"What about your parents?" he feels his own voice crack as he pleads. "Or your friends? They'd be worried if they found out you were gone. What if you never come back?"

The idea breaks him knowing that Ty may not even come out of this alive. He has to go back. He *needs to go back.*
He needs to get his head out of the god damn clouds and realise what kind of situation he's getting himself into *right now.*

"No, no, it's all fine!" Ty raises his arms in reassurance. "I told my mum I'd be staying over at a friends for a few nights. As for Tommy, I told him I was gonna be busy for the next few days. But it won't matter because I'll come back to them any—"

Ryan suddenly whips around, grabbing Ty by both of the shoulders as he snaps with a violent ferocity.

*"Do you even know what's coming out your mouth, kid?"* He yells at him, "you just dragged yourself into a living hellhole with an almost guaranteed certainty of death. These people I'm up against aren't just normal people. They're complete *psychopaths.* Just because

you're not in the game won't give them any less of a justified reason to not *slit your fucking throat open!"*

Saliva sprays onto Ty's face as he hisses at him — and his voice trails off, after seeing Ty's frozen, petrified expression. The corners of his eyes begin to gloss, and a solemn, single tear rolls down his face. Ryan stops. He lets go, backing away slowly as he already regrets himself for lashing out.

He didn't mean it. To hurt him.

Maybe his overprotectiveness was something that came out of failing to keep Altrive alive. Maybe that's why he's so worried for him.

"I'm sorry.." Ty whispers.

"No, I'm sorry." Ryan quickly apologises. "I'm sorry, Ty, for dragging you into this. Everything.. Everything was my fault, not yours. I should have just ran away from the hospital when I had the chance."

"Don't be sorry!" Ty cries, tugging onto his wrist. "You're one of the best things that has ever happened to me! I've always lived a really.. Well. Boring and normal life. You're only a few years older than me — I can't even imagine how it's like for someone like you to be competing in a game of Life-and-death."

He lowers his voice. "Besides, having a friend to talk with in real life... It's nice."

This just makes Ryan feel only even worse. He looks down, trying to think of something to change the topic. It doesn't seem like Ty's willing on going back any time soon.

Ryan then looks at his phone, which is being held in Ty's hand. He supposes he forgot to ask for it back — Ty's sort of just been keeping a hold of it unconsciously for the past few days now.

"Ty, how'd you even end up finding me anyway?" Ryan asks, changing the subject in hopes to liven the mood a little.

"Huh?" Ty's a little caught off-guard by the question. "Your phone, obviously."

He shows him the screen — the most recent message he's been sent was that night:

*RYAN HAS RUN AWAY. IF YOU TRAVEL WEST PAST THE CITY AND INTO THE BUSHLAND, TURN RIGHT AT THE LARGE, TALL TREE, AND CONTINUE TO SET STRAIGHT FORWARD INTO THE FOREST, THEN YOU WILL FIND HIM.*

As Ryan reads the messages, he raises an eyebrow.

"That's kinda weird," he finally says. "My phone doesn't usually tell me info like that.. It just tells me my environment and my whereabouts in a specific radius. It's almost as if my phone is completely.. *out of character."*

Suddenly, the phone pings for the first time in a couple of days.

*THAT'S BECAUSE IT IS OUT OF CHARACTER!*

At once, both the boys exclaim a "what?!" as the jump back. Ty's grip on the phone slips, and he frantically tries to catch it before it hits the ground.

*THIS ISN'T YOUR DIARY SPEAKING. IT'S ME! HI RYAN, HI TY. I'M GOING TO HELP YOU.*

"Wh.." Ty stammers in shock. "Who *are* you?"

*YOU CAN CALL ME YIMF. RYAN MAY HAVE SEEN ME BEFORE. I'M ONE OF GOD'S ASSISTANTS!*

"God's assistant..?" Ryan mumbles, blinking also in disbelief. "What are you.. *Doing* here? How long have you been here for?"

*WELL I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU GUYS FOR A LITTLE WHILE NOW.*

*I SWEAR I DON'T MEAN THAT IN A CREEPY WAY! D:*

"I hate to break it to you dude," Ty says, "but that's probably the creepiest thing I ever heard."

"Why have you been watching us, Yimf?" Ryan asks, ignoring Ty's small but comedic comment.

*BECAUSE I WANT YOU TO WIN.*

The words put him on edge, silencing him.

"Why don't you talk to us in person?" Ty also asks, totally brushing off what Yimf had just said.

*I CAN'T, YOU SEE.*

*BECAUSE I'M RUNNING.*

*I AM RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD. I CAN'T LET HIM KNOW WHERE I AM.*

Unlike Ryan, Ty allows his daring curiosity to take over him. "But he's God, isn't he? A God should know where everyone and everything is, right?"

*NO, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. THIS TIME, GOD DOESN'T KNOW.*

This somehow finally gets Ty to be quiet. A few long seconds pass before Ryan musters up the self-confidence to speak.

"Why do you want me to win?" He looks at Ty as he asks this, as if he was asking Ty the question instead. "Isn't that a little bias?"

*I WANT YOU TO WIN BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON I BELIEVE DESERVES IT, THAT'S WHY.*

...

*I AM TRYING TO HELP YOU BECAUSE I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THERE. I AM THE REASON YOU DIDN'T DIE THAT DAY.*

A vivid memory of himself confronting Techno that day replays in his mind as Yimf says that. The day being stabbed in the chest with a sword, being shot hundreds of feet across the skylines by a grappling hook only to crash into the windows of Ty's room.

So the reason he survived.. Was because of God's assistant?

"Wait, but it was Dr Halo that healed you?" Ty replies unsteadily.

*UM, THE DOCTOR WAS JUST A DISTRACTION MADE BY ME. HOW COULD A DOCTOR HEAL AN INJURY LIKE THAT IN A FEW DAYS?*

"He has a fair point." Ryan mumbles under his breath.

*ANYWAYS, LOOK. YOU MUST HUNT PLAYERS 1 AND 15 AND CONFRONT THEM NOW BEFORE THEY CAN HAVE TIME TO PREPARE. OTHERWISE, THEY'LL HUNT YOU DOWN INSTEAD.*

*THEY'RE ABOUT 100KM AWAY TO YOUR EAST.YOU'RE PREPARED ENOUGH, BUT YOU HAVE TO GET READY FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK. THEY COULD SHOW UP AT ANY TIME. THEY'RE SUPER GOOD! O_o*

*Oh god, this isn't good.*

That's his immediate thought. Player 1 is Technoblade, isn't it? Yeah, there was no doubt about it. Techno is Player 1.

He knew it would only be a matter of time before Techno is after him. If what Yimf is saying is true, and he really does want to help them.. Then he'll have to take his word for it. Now may be the best time to take down Techno once and for all.

Maybe now he can finally avenge Altrive.

*ALSO, TY. YOU NEED TO TURN AROUND AND LEAVE.*

That message also catches Ty off-guard.

"Wait, what?" He blinks.

*PLEASE, YOU HAVE TO. YOU HAVE TO TURN AROUND AND RUN AWAY. YOU'VE PLAYED YOUR PART. NOW IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GO.*

"You want me to leave?!" he yells out, "but.. But we've travelled for *miles!* I'd be completely lost if I were to try find my way back!!"

*NO! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOU'LL DIE.*

"I don't care, because I'm not going to die! I promise I won't die, I won't let it happen. I'm not leaving, that's final. And I *won't* die."

"Ty.." Ryan murmurs at him. The phone buzzes in his hands one last time.

...

*OKAY, SUIT YOURSELF. BUT IT'S YOUR OWN RISK FROM NOW ON...*

*GOODLUCK, YOU MUFFINS.YOU'LL NEED IT.*

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**NUMBER 15 — JSCHLATT**

As he stumbles to stand up on the beach, he feels a surge of

burning pain seethe through from his foot to his entire leg. His stance wobbles a little, and quickly he latches his hands around a tree beside him. He shuts his eyes tightly, biting his tongue in a poor attempt to block out the pain.

*Is this God's punishment on me for killing Cooper and lying to Techno about it?*

He feels his heart sink to the bottom of his stomach as he realises this. He knew from the minute he told Techno that Cooper had drowned on his own fault, he messed up. Why couldn't he just tell him it was *his* fault? Why does he always have to lie?

But he fears that if he did tell him, he'd make him snap, and he may die. He doesn't want to die, not like that.

But at this point... Who *knows* what Technoblade could be thinking anymore. Abruptly, he hears Techno's phone buzz for the third time today. Three messages in a row.

"What's with all the messages?" he asks, opening his eyes to find Techno still sitting on the sand, reading his screen intently. He wonders what he's reading.

"I don't know, but—.." Techno trails off, reading the words on his phone. His posture slumps a little. ".. *Oh."*

His soft, dejected 'oh' sends an uneasy feeling in Schlatt's gut. Whatever he saw, it wasn't good.

Technoblade looks up at him, waving his phone in his hand as he stands up. "We may be up against another fight really soon."

He walks over to him, showing him what his screen says:

*PLAYER NUMBER 9*
*RYAN / KRINIOS*
*LOCATION: 100KM AWAY WEST*
*THEY ARE TRAVELLING TOWARDS AN AREA WITH A LOT OF TREES AND MOUNTAINS. THEY ARE HUNTING FOR YOU. DO NOT FIGHT THEM ON YOUR OWN.*
*80% HOSTILITY*
*90% PREPARED*

The first thing Schlatt notices are the words 'they' and 'them'. If it was just one person, wouldn't the diary just refer to them as just a 'he'? 'They' is plural, isn't it? Or maybe it was just a spelling error made by God.

That, or #9 isn't alone.

"We'll have to engage in fight. I don't think it's something we can really run away from anymore," Techno starts. "Besides, it's narrowed down to the final four. We have to do something."

He speaks with monotone voice; his tone emotionless and deadpanned. Like as if Cooper's death had meant both nothing and everything to him at the same time.

"Does it say anywhere if 9 is with anyone?" Schlatt asks him, hoping that he's picked up on the plural term.

"I don't know. It didn't say. " Techno responds blandly, "but.. It did say something else."

Something else?

"What d—"

Schlatt intervenes himself as an unexpected, hollow yelp slithers out his mouth; his injured foot underneath him loses it's composure, and his entire leg stops working as he collapses to the floor.

"Are you alright?" Technno exclaims — though, he more so raised his voice than act worried. Still keeping his calm collectedness, he bends down to his knee to reach Schlatt's eye-level. He looks down at his shoe with the supposedly injured foot. Without asking, Techno wraps his hand around it, ripping it off.

Underneath is a painfully swollen, crimson-red foot, with patches of bright red blood painted over it. It looks terrible.

"Oh.." Techno murmurs. "Schlatt. Your foot..—"

"Yeah, I know." he seethes through grit teeth. "Oh, god."

Techno grimaces, noticing his obvious pain. "Can you.. Walk, at least?"

He tries to push himself up, but he can't — his foot can't seem to even function.

"I can't even stand!" He cries. "Oh fuck! This is really fucking bad. *How am I supposed to fight if I can't even stand!?"*

The boy replies with nothing but silence, musing to himself as he tries to devise a plan.

"I could fight him alone.." he suggests. "But that may not be a good idea. We should always stick together."

He looks at him in a funny way as he says the last part — for just a second, a small glint of morality coruscates in his emotionless eyes, like as if the words had triggered something within him.

Techno then returns his attention back to Schlatt's foot. "How did your entire ankle become like that, anyway?"

He sighs, but it sounds more like a groan than a sigh. "I don't know man. I remember putting a bunch of weird chemicals on it a few days ago. I think it may have reacted to the wa*taAAagHh!"*

He retracts his foot back as it aches again, jerking as he blocks his mouth with a hand to stop himself from whimpering any further. Just as soon as it came, the pain ceases again — though he's not sure for how long it will keep that way for.

"Well shit." is all Technoblade says.

"It doesn't help that the only way my diary can tell my future is by bargaining," Schlatt mutters behind his clasped mouth. To his surprise, Techno scoffs a little at this.

"If only your diary could bargain for a new leg, huh?"

*Bargain for a new leg?*

An idea comes into his mind.

A very good idea.

"Wait a minute..." Schlatt raises a finger; a sense of anticipation and hope gradually begins to build up inside him. "You may be onto something..."

"Huh? Did I say something?"

"Yeah, you did." Schlatt grabs his phone. "And if this works... Then maybe we'll not only have a chance against 9.. But a chance *at final two."*

He pulls up the on-screen keyboard, and types into the log:

*'CAN I BARGAIN FOR PHYSICAL OBJECTS?'*

He holds his breath as he presses enter, and waits in suspense for a response. Sure enough, he gets one, and he can only assume it's a reply directly from God himself.

*YOUR PRICE WOULD BE MUCH HIGHER BUT...*
*I SUPPOSE I'LL ALLOW IT. JUST THIS ONCE.*

His entire face lights up at the response — it's possible!

"Holy shit!" he cries out. "Techno, you're a fucking genius!"

That means his plan could work. It could *actually* work.

"Yeah I get that a lot." Techno replies, cracking a small smirk. "... So.. What exactly did I do that was genius?"

"Well, I always assumed that I could only bargain for my future. But what I *didn't* know was that I could actually bargain for physical objects!" He points to his phone. "The price to pay for it is definitely higher, but it's still possible."

His fingers scurry across his phone screen as he types out another message.

*'WHAT DO I HAVE TO GIVE FOR A HANG-GLIDER?'*

He feels his entire consciousness stop as his phone buzzes with a reply; immediately, his enthusiasm is replaced with a cold, lurking sense of dread. Techno senses the sudden change in atmosphere, and he speaks lowly.

"What is it now?"

Schlatt gulps.

"Techno," he says slowly, "how good are you at aiming?"

"Where is this coming from?"

"Just answer me."

He frowns. "Well.. I'd say I'm pretty good."

"What about balancing?"

"Good at that too."

Silence.

"... Why do you want to know?" Techno narrows his eyes at him. Schlatt looks up, and he turns his phone around to show him the screen.

*'WHAT DO I HAVE TO GIVE FOR A HANG-GLIDER?'*

*YOUR LEG.*

*In order for my plan to work... I have to give up my entire leg. I have to give up my ability to walk?!*

This changes a lot of things. Will his plan be worth it after all?

"Whatever plan you have in mind.." Techno mumbles. "Is it worth doing it if that means you have to give up your leg?"

It's the exact question that Schlatt's internally debating on right now. *Is* it worth it?

On one hand, if he manages to pull off the idea he has in mind then they'd be able to cruise to until the final two. It was a perfect strategy. But if it fails, the sacrifice of his leg would be in vain.

*.. But I suppose if it does fail, I'll die anyway, right?*

... Maybe losing a leg isn't such a big deal compared to death. Right?

No, of course he's right. Losing a leg means nothing to him if that means he may have a chance at winning the title of God. After all, sacrifices have to be made in order to progress.

It's only fair, after all. He's been taking things away from people his whole life.

And maybe it's finally his turn to have something taken from him.

"Well, if I'm gonna die.." Schlatt looks over to him, his forceful self-confidence returning back into his voice. "Then I'm going to go out with a bang. So you know what? Fuck it."

He opens up his camera on his phone, and shines the light down at his own leg as he yells:

*"TAKE MY LEG, GOD! TAKE IT YOU FUCKING COWARD!"*

As he presses the snapshot button, a blinding white light suddenly flashes in his field of vision — temporarily stunning both him and Technoblade, causing Schlatt to shut his eyes tightly again.

He feels a burning pain tear in his leg, but the feeling dissipates quickly after — too quick for him to react. The white light then fades, and within a few seconds everything returns to normal.

Schlatt opens his eyes, and the first thing he notices is that he's still standing. But there's a much lighter weight pulling down below him than before.

He looks down at his leg. It's covered by his pants. With one

hand, he pulls up the cuffs of his dress pants. Inside, reveals a wooden leg — Kind of like the ones those pirates in the cartoons would have.

He yells, stumbling back and falling over. He actually did it. He actually just did that.

*His entire leg is really gone, and there's no going back now.*

"Woah, what's this?"

Techno seems to be pre-occupied with something else.

His attention turns to the other boy, whose bending down beside a large, odd contraption — Is that meant to be the hang-glider?

He checks his phone.

***DEAL PAID.***

*HERE, THIS IS A NEW INVENTION I HAVE CREATED. IT ACTS LIKE A HANG-GLIDER, BUT OPERATES AS EFFICIENTLY AS AN EAGLE'S WINGS.*

*I CALL IT: THE ELYTRA.*

He looks back at the contraption.

It's a large pair of light bluish-grey, wings — it's texture looks similar to a regular hang-glider. Techno lifts it up, and below it has two straps. Those must be where you put your arms.

"It's Elytra." Schlatt answers, half-dazed. He shakes his head to snap himself out from shock, and tries to crawl over to Techno, whose observing the elytra carefully.

"So like, wings?" Techno utters, dropping it to Schlatt. "Why would you get *wings* of all things?"

"Because it's all part of my plan, that's why." Schlatt replies, taking the contraption in both hands as he tries to uncomfortably kneel.

Feeling the Elytra in his hands gives him a new sense of feeling. Maybe this *was* possible, after all. He can't help but allow a prideful grin appear along his face.

"You know what they say, Blade."

Clutching the hangglider in hand, he turns up to shoot Techno an unexpected smug smirk.

*"You ready for Operation: Technoplane?"*

# ➳ CHAPTER 40: portal jumper

***NOTE: this chapter is the longest chapter I have ever written. gahh I apologise in advance for making it so long D: I really hope nonetheless you'll enjoy even if it is long. But I assure you it will be worth the read!!***

**[ also, for better effect, listen to the music throughout the whole time reading. :)) ]**

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**PLAYER NUMBER 9 — RYAN / KRINIOS**

*OKAY, SUIT YOURSELF. BUT IT'S YOUR OWN RISK FROM NOW ON...*

*GOODLUCK, YOU MUFFINS. YOU'LL NEED IT.*

He swallows anxiously as the discomforting message appears on the screen. To his horror, he's being forced into *another* fight. He knew this day would come eventually, but God could never prepare him for ever being *ready* for it. Much less had he thought he'd end up engaging in fight with an outsider.

He shuts his eyes, trying to cloud out the memories of Altrive's death. Is it going to happen again?

Will he fail at keeping Ty alive **just like he did with Altrive**?

Ever since he was a kid, he was always burdened to solitude — unable to defend himself from the weight of misery his parents dropped on top of him.

So how could he? How could he protect Ty? How could he protect somebody *if he was never even able to protect himself?*

"Ty..." Ryan starts, but is quickly cut off as Ty taps frantically at the screen.

"Wait, look!"

Ryan zips his lips as he peers over to look:

*ALSO, I HAVE SOMETHING TO GIVE TY. WEAR IT.*

As if the diary knew when Ryan finished reading, an object suddenly appears with a 'poof!' from nothing, falling into Ty's hand.

"A mask?" Ty questions.

Wearing a mask is probably for the best. If anything were to happen that puts Ty's identity in jeopardy, no one will be able to know who he is. It's quite smart, actually.

"It must be to hide your identity," Ryan muses. "Can you even see

through that?"

Ty puts it on without hesitation, placing the mask over his face as he clips it's straps behind the back of his head. To his complete surprise, he can see perfectly through the disguise.

"Yeah, crazy enough I can!" Ty exclaims in awe. "Holy *shit,* I feel so cool."

He pulls out his knife from his hand-made holster he crafted at home. He may or may not have stolen that knife from the kitchen before he left to go find Ryan.

Seeing him hold his weapon makes Ryan remember to brace himself too. He still has his pistol from way back when he fought Technoblade at the skyscrapers. Cocking the gun to make sure it still has ammo (which it does), he grips it firmly in his right hand beside him as he walks.

"Are you even taking this seriously?" Ryan asks quietly after a bit, shooting Ty an anxious glare.

"Huh?" Ty blinks, "wh.. Of course I am."

"Really? 'Cus you seem way too excited for something that could cost us our life.. *And* another life."

Ty thinks about this for a second. "Well, I've never done anything interesting like this in my life. And if I'm being honest, I am scared. But I can't act like that, can't I? We need to give our enemies the benefit of the doubt, yeah? It's all about deception!"

He throws his fist up, cracking a smile from behind his mask. Ryan's about to reply, when his phone in Ty's hand buzzes again.

*Must be another message from Yimf,* Ryan assumes. But when Ty unlocks the phone and opens messages, the life in his body dissipates; his skin turns a ghostly pale, sending a dreadful pang inside Ryan's gut.

"What..?" He asks slowly, and Ty turns the phone around at him.

***DEAD END.***

It's like his entire heart stops beating as a whole. A hard lump catches amidst Ryan's throat, choking him back on his words.

No.

No, it can't be. This can't be happening.

**"This is it, isn't it?"** He mumbles under his breath. "I'm dead. I'm a dead man walking and there's nothing I can do about it."

"That doesn't mean it's over." Ty murmurs back to him. He puts the phone back into his pocket, clenching his fist. "We still have a chance, Ryan."

Ryan looks up at him with his dead, dull eye as he breathes out shakily. "How do you know that, Ty? *Do you really think we can win?"*

"I have hope that we can," is all he says, nodding to himself as he grips his weapon, continuing to walk. "And hope is all I need to drive me forward."

*Hope.*

And suddenly, Ryan's uneasiness fades away, replaced with a weird sense of blissfulness.

*That's something Altrive would have said.*

How were they able to do it? To have hope? It was something he could never understand or bring himself to believe.

But maybe he could do it — maybe he could believe, just this one time.

As the two continue to walk, Ty's about to reach to check the phone when he feels something pound inside his gut. A tingle runs up his spine, kicking up his alertness. He halts, sensing something strange about the environment. Ryan turns around, noticing that the boy had stopped walking.

"Ryan, do you feel that?" Ty whispers.

"Feel what?" Is his response, blinking back blankly. Ty narrows his eyes, his sight darting back and forth.

"*A presence."*

Something — No, some*one's* nearby. Someone's nearby and he can feel it.

"They must be close." Ty murmurs again, waiting a little more for any sign of human life that would pounce out from the trees or shoot up from the mountains. But there is none.

"I can't hear anything." Ryan whispers after a minute of longing silence. "C'mon, let's just keep moving. Keep your eyes peeled, though."

Then suddenly, from the corner of his eye, Ty sees a flicker of swift movement. He spins around, tightening his grip on his knife as he tries to pinpoint where the odd figure went. Something was there — he could swear he saw something, zoom past the trees.

"What is it?" Ryan urges him, panic rising in his own voice. "Did you see them?"

Ty turns back around slowly. He's frozen for a minute, before whispering. "I thought I saw something... But never—"

But he chokes back on his words as he sees a blurred figure zoom directly past from behind Ryan. Sucking in his breath, he watches in terror as the figure darted from left to right in the blink of an eye; Ryan's entire body goes rigid, and as if the world is moving in slow motion, his eyes grow wide a few seconds later, feeling something cold and wet dribble down his neck.

It's blood.

"... — *Mind."*

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**TECHNOBLADE**

"Operation *what?"*

"Operation: Technoplane," Schlatt repeats, crawling over to a tree beside them to hold himself up. He stumbles to stand up, leg shaking as he tries to contain his composure. He grips onto the bark with one hand, while holding the Elytra in the other.

Seeing the blank expression on Techno's face, he smirks. "Since bargaining for a physical object is possible, I decided to bargain for a type of air transport, specifically a hang-glider. But I didn't get that, I got scammed. In fact, I don't know what the fuck an 'Elytra' is. But it's gotta be more efficient than a hang-glider. I mean, they're wings god dammit! It can't be that hard to operate, can't it?"

Technoblade folds his arms, signalling for him to continue; listening to the man as he rambles on about his plan.

"Anyways, whether I accepted the bargain or not, either outcome would have resulted in me not being able to walk properly. So I figured, if I wasn't going to walk, I could at least be able to *fly*. So here's the plan, Blade: I'm going to be operating the aircraft and control where we'll fly. You're gonna be the projectile — so you'll be balancing on my back. You have a sword, grappling hook, and gun — fighting shouldn't be too hard."

*... I guess I can attach the hook of the grappling gun around the handle of my sword, and use it like some sort of trident or spear.*

"Yeah, I could work with that." Techno agrees.

"We'll also be entering a field with a wide range of mountains and trees, which will be perfect to gain velocity to fly."

"And with higher ground... We *should* be able to pull this off?"

"Well it's not like we can back away from this now," Schlatt says, tugging the Elytra over his shoulder. Handling the straps, he clicks it onto him as if he were wearing a backpack. "I already lost my fucking leg after all, thank God it being the bad one. So I - *We* - can't afford to screw this up."

As he finishes his sentence, he manages to finally click the last of the buckles on the straps — Schlatt's now wearing a pair of Elytra on him.

Despite the light, aquamarine wings still being contracted, they appear much larger than they did when he was holding it. Techno wonders how they'll look once he starts to *really* fly — it must be a magical sight. Like something you'd see off a mythical movie, or read from a fantasy book.

"C'mon," Schlatt gestures, "let's find some high ground so I can fly this sucker."

He nods, running over to put an arm around Schlatt to help him walk. The two start limping towards an upwards slope nearby them.

According to the diary, their opponents were 100km away to the west. So all they had to do was soar west until hopefully, one of them would spot their targets.

Finally, after a few painful minutes of walking, the two reach the ledge of a tall cliff. Below it is a colossal spread of never ending valleys of forests, hills and mountains. Techno lets go of Schlatt's arm, letting the man try to stand for himself as he walks back a few feet.

With the wind blowing towards the direction they're flying, they'll be able to catch more speed and fly faster — however, they'll be quicker to lose height, which would mean he'd have to be really good at controlling. In contrast if the wind were to blow the opposite way, they'd be pulled back a lot more. But on the upside, they'll have more height.

But in the situation they're in now, Techno assumes Schlatt wants speed over height.

As Schlatt stands a few feet before the edge, still trying to adapt to his wooden leg, he lets out a nervous sigh.

Of course he'd feel nervous. He's going to fly.

"Are you ready?" Techno asks him.

"Not necessarily." Schlatt mumbles under his breath, feeling around at his straps for something to extend his wings. "How do you work this stupid thing?"

Then his fingers reach a small, subtle flap, hanging from one of the straps. He pulls it, and suddenly the wings spread apart like an eagle about to take off.

It's massive, and he can't help but gasp in awe. Schlatt turns around at him, grinning.

"**This is it, isn't it?**" He laughs anxiously. "We're going to do this. I'm going to fly."

Reaching to his backpack, Technoblade opens it, fumbling around with the items inside. He pulls out his grappling hook, and unsheathes his sword as he attaches the hook around it's handle.

"Damn right," Techno says, walking over to the man with his weapon in hand. He hesitates a moment, before gripping tightly onto Schlatt's shoulder with his free hand. "They'll be calling you Mr Sullenberger after this."

Schlatt lets out a small laugh, easing him a little from his nervousness.

Then, he bends down, preparing himself for flight as he whispers

subconsciously to himself.

*"It's now or never."*

And then he jumps off.

✧ ⋆ ✖ ⋆ ✧

Wings spread gracefully apart, he soars like lightning through the skies; Schlatt's heart racing and stomach flipping as he glides through the air like an eagle; Techno already having climbed onto his back, he locks his legs around Schlatt's waist, as if sitting on top of a horse. One hand gripping tightly on the back of Schlatt's collar, while the other holding his weapon, he leans forward.

At first, the flight was incredibly shaky — I mean, he's never done anything like this before. The first few seconds were non-stop screaming, until Schlatt managed to gradually get the hang of aiming and controlling where he's going. It's not entirely all that hard once you learn the basics.

So before they knew it, they managed to do it — they managed to *fly*.

And here they are now, zooming along across the sky, both eyes peeled at the grounds below for their targets.

Turbulent wind blows against Techno's face; his light amber-to-pink hair dancing heroically within the wind; his cloak-like hood blowing back, leaving a blurred trail of red across the noon's skies. His sharp, crimson eyes scan the land below, looking observantly for 9 and his possible 'companion.'

As they glide briskly along the mountain ranges, Techno's eyes dart to a small figure in the distance, walking along in a forest.

"Schlatt!" he exclaims, "down there!"

Down below them is a wide, open space of the forest. In the middle of the clear space are two boys.

Schlatt looks down, and he sees them too. "I'm going lower!"

He leans down, and starts to lower down — not too low to reach the ground, but just above the trees so that they can get a better look at them. With the wind propelling them from behind, they catch up almost instantly.

They zoom across the trees below them, and manage to catch sight of them for a couple of seconds before they fly past — there were two boys. One was the familiar face of Number 9, while the other was a shorter boy wearing a pink outfit. Even despite him wearing a mask over his face, Techno knows he doesn't recognise him.

"Did you see that?!" Schlatt yells over the wind as he flies past, "there's *2!?!"*

"I know!" Techno yells back, "Circle back around! Get to their

height level and maybe I can strike an attack as we fly past them again!"

"But Techno! That'll mean I have to go *through* the forest! *What if I hit a tree?!"*

"Just do it! I'll help guide you!"

Schlatt obliges hesitantly, and he leans lower, heading further towards ground-level. Techno grips onto him tightly, leaning left as he turns him around, heading back the same way they came from. Dropping down in a small opening into the forest, they are now only about 5 meters up from the ground.

The forest isn't too heavily compacted — but there are still many trees in their way. But with the wind now pushing against them, Schlatt's momentum rate slows down a little as they glide through the forest. He leans left — then right — then left again, swiftly dodging any incoming trees. With his high human reaction time, Techno's able to react almost immediately to the obstacles he can visually see.

As they approach closer to their targets, Schlatt leans a little lower down to pick up more speed. Soaring now at almost 1 metre from the floor at what feels like 100km/h. They finally fly into the open area, seeing the two boys standing there. Techno shoots out his arm with his sword in hand, readying himself to strike.

As they zoom behind across #9, the tip of the blade slices against the back of his neck — the wound being too shallow to kill him, but deep enough to leave a mark.

As if the world is slowing down, Techno's eyes widen as he sees blood spill from the back of his neck as they fly by. Even if it was only for a split second — he sees it. Blood.

And as if something had rewired itself once again within the depths of his unrestrained mind — like something psychological revamping the neurons making up his brain's nerves — s*omething snaps.*

A crazed glimmer sparkles in his now glowing red pupils, and he laughs maniacally as they fly past.

"He's gotta know we're here now!" Techno laughs, as Schlatt soars out from the forest and back into the air up high again.

"You didn't just kill the fucker?"

"No, *but where's the fun in that if I did!?"*

Schlatt scoffs, gliding up as he travels through the sky, circling back around. Soaring up high enough, they're able to see both 9 and his companion break off into a sprint. Schlatt chases after them, yelling at Techno.

"Is that second guy with him even part of the game?"

"I don't think so," Techno responds, readjusting his grip on his

sword with the grappling hook wrapped around it. "What a fool, that kid doesn't know what he's getting himself into."

His grip moves from his sword to the grappling pistol, clutching onto it as the sword dangles from the side; hisses maliciously from under his breath:

*"After all, there's not enough space here for two people with high egos."*

Gliding past the skies to catch up, they're now flying above their opponents. Aiming the gun at 9, who's running below him, Techno pulls the trigger — the grappling hook with the sword attached to the end of it shoots down, slicing the side of 9's face as it stabs him in the shoulder.

He lets out a shout, and Techno pulls the trigger again, retracting the zipline. It yanks 9 up a few feet into the air before the sword finally pulls out from his shoulder, causing him to fall onto the ground. He lands with a heavy *THUD* onto the floor, but quickly stumbles back up again to run back with his friend.

*"TECHNOPLAAAAANE!"* Techno yells out, raising his sword in the air as he leans forward to signal Schlatt to go lower.

So he dives down, getting near ground level for Techno to land another few hits. His grip quickly moves to his sword, and he spins the weapon around in his hands like a propelling turbine engine, as they fly in between 9 and his masked friend. The sword cuts the side of the masked boy's face, while also slicing 9's arm at the same time as they swiftly zoom past, flying back up into the air again.

The attack on 9 sends him stumbling off to the side, eventually making him lose his stance as he falls down weakly. His friend diverts his direction, running towards to help 9. It's pathetic, if Techno's being honest.

"Haha, suck it son of a bitch!" Schlatt laughs out, flying through the air as he circles around them. His masked friend looks to be saying something to 9. And then, 9 holds out his hand.

"*HAVE A KRINIOS DAY!"* he shouts out.

But to Techno's utmost surprise, there's suddenly a bright flash.

*Was that... his catchphrase?*

This must be the first time a user has ever used their catchphrase in the entire game. It's meant to give a special ability, right?

And just as quickly as it started, the light disappears, and suddenly a large object appears in 9's hand.

It's an oddly shaped white gun — he's never seen anything like it before. However, 9 seems to know what it is.

"Holy *fuck!"* he exclaims, voice strained as he tries to keep himself

from seething with burning pain. "*It's a portal gun!*"

A *what?*

9 holds the gun in both hands as he's laying down, aiming it towards a mountain in the distance. He pulls the trigger to his 'portal gun', and a brisk blue flash of light strikes out from the weapon, summoning a small, cyan-glowing portal on the mountains in the far yonder. He gasps, and then fires again at the floor below him. Below him is an orange portal, and the two boys fall inside, disappearing.

"Huh?!"

Techno looks over at the mountains far off, where the blue portal was. He sees 9 and his friend fall out from that porta — Oh! It clicks now.

The portal gun can summon portals to fall out from — entering one portal will lead you to exit from the other.

The orange portal below them deactivates, leaving the two alone in the sky.

"What are you waiting for?" Techno yells at Schlatt. "*Fly after them!*"

"Oh, right!"

Schlatt lowers down on top of a tree, using it as his launchpad to kick off and gain height again. Fast enough, they pick up more speed as they fly through the wind — and now, they are back up high, soaring through the skies once again as they zoom over to their targets at the far mountain. Approaching closer, they see 9 and his friend running across uphill on the mountain. They're heading towards the top — but what for? That would make them easy targets.

"Schlatt!" Techno then calls out, an idea forming in mind. *"I need you to hold me upside down by the legs!"*

"What?!" comes his baffled response. "But what if— What if I drop you?!"

"You won't!"

He nods wearily, and raises up both his hands as he grasps tightly onto Techno's ankles. The boy sitting above him yanks himself off — and now, he's hanging upside-down below Schlatt with his sword in hand, soaring through the skies at tens of km/hr. Schlatt's heart races in his chest, fearing one small slip of his hand would send Techno crashing to his death. How can he take such a gamble like that? All for *one idea?*

"Woohooo!" Techno exclaims, the wind blowing through his face as he cheers in blood-pumping excitement. As they near the mountains, both 9 and his friend run up and make it to the top. Aiming to fly right above them, Techno preps his grip on his sword.

As they glide over the two boys, Techno slashes his sword once again around him, injuring the two.

*"Score!"* he exclaims again. "*Where's my x2 booster?!"*

But 9 doesn't stumble down. Instead, he runs to the edge of the cliff, shooting a portal down at the depths below. He whips around, shooting an orange one on some grass land further away. He takes his friend's hand, and jumps off the cliff.

"Fly to the orange!" Techno commands, and Schlatt shifts direction to follow his orders. Techno sways side to side, before swinging up and over back on Schlatt's back again.

As they soar, the two other boys shoot out from the orange portal high into the air.

When they jumped off the cliff, they must have fallen into the blue portal below. That's actually a pretty smart tactic — from the build-up of momentum from falling, they'll end up sky-rocketing out from the other portal. And so with that, 9 and his friend shoot up from the orange portal and into the air. As they reach near them, Techno kneels up on Schlatt's back, balancing with his sword in hand. Zooming by them, he lands a blow at the masked friend's shoulder, slicing it open for a split-second in mid-air.

Then, 9 shoots another portal beneath them, and another one at more land ahead. As they fall, they appear out of the other.

*Do they really think by portal-jumping, they'll manage to get away?*

While he does have to admit — 9 seems to know how to operate portal guns well. Could this be perhaps he's had some practice at this before?

And so the fight drags on. As 9 and his friend jump through portals across the valleys and mountains, Technoplane would glide after them, showing no mercy as they paint wedges of blood and slices across their skin with their blade. While 9's efforts of escaping using the power of portals was good, it was still no match against Technoblade's wrath.

As they fly through the air, 9 and his friend parkour along the mountains — shooting and jumping through portals accordingly, even despite their injuries. Techno, operating as pilot of the human aircraft, sees a perfect opportunity to engage in direct fight.

"Lower down!" he commands, "I'm jumping off!"

Schlatt does so, and once they reach low enough, Techno kicks off from Schlatt's back; leaping onto the ground effortlessly, he darts over towards 9 with his sword ready in hand.

"*You can't run away from all your problems, even with a portal gun!"* he yells out, kicking down the masked friend with no mercy. The boy falls with a cry to the ground.

"You don't know *anything!"* 9 spits, shrieking out as he tries to

kick Techno. He dodges, and with a swift slash, Techno's sword cuts through 9's hood's material, slicing his stomach as blood pours out.

*"Technoblade knows all."* He grins, raising his sword again for another blow to his side, except 9 dodges it. With shaking hands, 9 pounds his large portal gun into Techno's stomach, making him splutter out blood. He's about to land another kick at Techno, when the hitman leans quickly over to the right, dodging the attack.
As he bends down, he darts around him, slicing his legs with the blade of his sword as he jumps back up again, swinging a fist at his face. 9 shrieks, blood dribbling from his nose and mouth, also oozing out from the other slits and cuts all over his body. He cries out, turning around to shoot his gun at Techno's chest.

Instead of summoning a portal, it acts as a sort of blast canon — sending him flying back a couple of feet. 9 turns around to run.

"Oh *no you don't!!"* Techno laughs at him, grabbing his grappling hook, which is now untied from the sword. He raises it at him, aiming before pulling the trigger. The hook claws into his hood over his back, and as the zip-line retracts, it pulls 9 back. Techno rushes over to him, knocking him hard in the side of his head with the pommel of his sword, causing 9 to drop his portal gun.

Techno sheathes the sword fleetingly, before grabbing the gun. He shoots a blue portal below 9's feet — while shooting another at a tall tree miles ahead nearby the slope to a cliff. Seconds before 9 falls in, Techno ditches the portal gun inside as well; So as 9 appears out from the other portal as he lands with an even *heavier THUD* on the gravel and rock ground, the portal gun smashing on top of his head is a bonus.

*He's weak from the fall. I should be able to kill him right now.*

But before he's able to jump into the portal, a quick figure, supposedly the Masked friend, darts and hops inside before he can.

"Get them!!" Schlatt yells, limping hurriedly as he jumps into the portal. Techno's about to jump in when the portal closes.

*Dammit, he must have deactivated it.*

As Schlatt makes it out the turquoise-glowing portal, he lands a bit further away from Masked boy and 9. He hits the ground hard, scraping his elbows, however his wings wrapped around him protecting his lower part of the body from the fall.

*Now's my chance! I have to end him,* is what he thinks. He props himself up, looking forward. In front of him is the ledge of the mountain's cliff, a couple meters away. He turns around; behind him is 9, laying weakly and vulnerable on the ground.

Then, the masked companion rushes over and stands in front of 9,

blocking him with his body with spread-out arms. Schlatt approaches him.

"You think that's gonna do anything?" he scoffs. But the masked boy doesn't say anything.

Instead, he freezes in his spot. Schlatt raises an eyebrow at his sudden shift in confidence. And for the first time, he speaks from behind his mask.

"Sch... *Schlatt?"*

His voice tears through his heart as he speaks with quivering words. Schlatt stops.

No way... It can't be.

It *can't* be him.

The masked boy puts a hand to his mask, taking it off. Behind it reveals a familiar face Schlatt has grown up with during his middle-school years.

"... *Ty!?"*

# ➳ CHAPTER 41: HIS NAME WAS ZAK

**[ play the music all the way through for better effect ]**

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

**PLAYER NUMBER 15 — JSCHLATT**

Ty was a boy he knew back in his middle school years. He hadn't talked much about him — in fact, he hadn't been thinking of him at all recently.

It all started back at the camp they had together that night — back when Schlatt and Connor had first met Techno.

*"Schlatt & Co was what brought us together! A company founded by myself, of course, and co-founded by my partner. Connor."*

*Connor smiled warmly at himself as he is filled with memories from his past.*

*"Remember that time when Ty told you that you had a dick on your back, Schlatt? And then you started going all like 'what the fuck!' ?"*

They had known Ty for years. In fact, Schlatt even know him way back in his childhood years. Ty was a couple years younger than Connor and Schlatt, but that never stopped them from being known as the 'Schlatt & Co' trio back in their school days.

As a trio, they'd always been close to each other. *Always.*

Until Ty moved away to live out near the city, far away from Schlatt and Connor. It was since then, was the last time Schlatt had seen him.

But now he's here. Standing in front of him. And how the hell *Ty* managed to drag himself into this game, he has *no idea.*

"*Ty?!"* he exclaims, quickly covering his mouth as he wobbles a little. Ty's hand shakes as he holds his mask.

"What are.. *What are you doing here?"* he gapes.

"Well I was going to ask you the same thing!" Schlatt cries out. "You're not even part of the game! *What the fuck are you doing here?!* You're going to get yourself killed!!"

"I... I...!" Ty stutters out. He turns to #9, who's lying helpless on the ground behind Schlatt; plastered with gashes of blood and slashes of wounds. "You're.. Not gonna kill him, right?"

The question catches him off guard.

*Well.. Of course I was. It's kind of my fucking job.*

It's not like he's left with any other choices. If he leaves him alive, Techno will surely end up killing #9 sometime later anyway.

Maybe even Schlatt too, while he's at it.

In fact, Techno can kill them both right here, right now. That would guarantee him a place in top 2 with Joko. Then the rest will be left up to fate.

Slowly, Schlatt turns around to look down at 9's body. But what *really* confuses him is how Ty managed to befriend him. Much less, get himself involved in this game. Did 9 not warn him what he's getting himself into?

"How did you two...?" Schlatt starts, but Ty finishes off his sentence.

"Meet? He crashed into my apartment with a grappling hook a few weeks ago. I helped him to the hospital and snuck him into my room to stay with me. Then we became friends."

He can't even think of any way to respond to that. What is he *supposed to do?*

Ty suddenly runs over to Schlatt, grabbing him by the shoulders as he suddenly exclaims. "Schlatt! Please, you can't kill him! You can't kill Ryan!"

*What am I supposed to do?!*

He bites his lip, looking down at the desperate face of Ty; his hazel eyes, glimmering with an anguished plea, begging for him to spare 9's life.

...

Schlatt breathes out slowly, lowering his voice as he bends down a little to Ty's height.

"Okay," he says softly, as if making sure nobody else is listening. "I won't. I won't kill him. But... I can't guarantee you that Techno will do the same."

"Techno?" Ty asks, before stepping back a little in realisation. "Techno is your friend? I thought he was crazy!"

"Well you're not necessarily wrong there," Schlatt frowns, "it's.. Hard to explain. He's not crazy. Just... *Motivated."*

He gulps at the last word, uneasiness forming in the pit of his stomach as the word slithers anxiously off his tongue. Because at this point, if Schlatt's being honest — He doesn't even *know*.

It was ever since that night — the night of their reunion, when he backstabbed Joko's alliance to form back up with Techno and have a team of three. It was ever since that night, he had changed. His behaviour became completely unpredictable to him; his actions felt robotic, ceased of human morality. But what had changed the most was his *motive*.

Something had pushed Techno to his peak that night. Whatever it was, it gave him a *motive*. A reason to get his head into the game and a reason to thirst for blood.

Out of nowhere, Ty runs past Schlatt, crouching to his knees in front of Ryan's body. He grabs Ryan's arms, heaving as he tries to lift him up.

" What are you doing?"

"Well c'mon," the boy grunts, stumbling up with the boy in his arms. "Help me! Help me lift him up and get out of here before he kills us all!"

*Kill us all? He's not talking about Techno, right?*

"I can't do that, Ty." Schlatt says.

He shoots him a bewildering glare. "Why not?!"

Schlatt looks down, hesitating. "Because—"

Suddenly, he feels a firm hand grip his shoulder, and he's pushed aggressively onto the floor. Schlatt tries to stand back up, but his wooden leg fails him. So instead, he cranes his neck around — Standing behind him is a man cloaked with a dark red hood and white (but stained) collar shirt. His face and clothes are smeared with blood.

"I walked *all* the way here," Techno mutters at him, "and neither of them are even dead yet?"

Techno marches over to Ty, who's trying to lift up Ryan. He grabs him by the collar of his hood with an iron grip, making Ty yell out in surprise. He struggles in his grip, but his efforts are futile as Techno drags Ty behind him. Schlatt's heart drops as he watches Techno approach the ledge of the cliff. Ty yells, kicking around even more.

*No. No, no, no, no.*

"Techno!" Schlatt yells out. "*Stop!"*

Techno ignores him, and he holds his hand with Ty out over the edge of the cliff — one slip of a hand will send Ty falling down into the depths of the unknown abyss. Petrified, Ty stops struggling, afraid that he'll he dropped if he does.

"Shouldn't have taken my spotlight, helpless mortal." Techno hisses at him, grinning at Ty's terror. His grip is firm as he clutches Ty's collar in one hand. "*Maybe this will teach you a lesson of screwing yourself over like this—"*

*"STOP!!"*

Techno stops. He turns around.

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*"Don't do it!"* Schlatt cries out, laying in a crawl-like position on the ground. Grabbing the attention of Techno, he looks him in the eye with a glare as sharp as the blade of a knife. With a stern voice, he demands. *"Put. Him. Down."*

Techno returns the sinister glare.

"Why should I?" he scoffs ridiculously. Schlatt snarls back, his stare hardening as he hisses.

"Listen here, *Technoblade,"* he snaps. "Ever since the day I met you, I stuck by your side. I helped you on your mission to find Travis and I did what you wanted me to do. I followed your orders, like a fucking puppy. I manipulated Wilbur to make him think I was on his side. I betrayed Joko to save you. I assisted in helping you kill #10 at the skyscrapers. I killed..."

*... I killed Cooper...*

He quickly silences himself at that, shaking his head. "Look, the point is, I'm an awful human being. Just like you."

There's an accusing, menacing trail of venom lingering behind his words as he hisses.

"I fucking helped you get your hands dirty. I helped conduct the murder of real, living, *people*. And it doesn't end there, either. I scammed people in my past life. I robbed people of the things they rightfully owned. Whether it was money.. Or even their life. I've done things. I've done really, fucked up things. And it's not going to end, not until this game is over."

He points at Techno.

"If surviving 'til only there's only the two of us standing means I'll have to get the blood on my hands and kill the other players, I'll fucking do it. But killing an innocent boy who knows nothing better than you yourself.. *That's where I have to draw the fucking line."*

His hand shoots to his pocket, and he pulls out the small pistol he still has in his holster. He fumbles with the gun a little, until gripping it tightly in his hands and aiming it directly at Techno's head.

"I'll kill you!" he spits, "I'll kill 9. I'll kill Joko. I'll kill you all! I don't care what I do, or what you want me to do, or what will fucking happen as long as if the outcome stays the same. *As long as you let the innocent boy live."*

Techno, taken aback by the sudden outburst of rage coming from Schlatt's mouth, grinds his teeth together. His clutch on Ty tightens, more so in frustration than intimidation. A blazing fire arises in his vibrant, red eyes — burning with a raw, screaming hatred and sense of messed-up justice. A crazed, maniacal look in his eyes that Schlatt swears he's never seen before.

"You don't get it, don't you, Schlatt?" Techno growls. "I don't *care* if he's just a boy. I don't *care* if he's not even in the game. Whether you're playing or not, if you're standing in my way, *you're going to deal with the fucking consequences.* I will become God. *I* ***will become God and I'll eliminate everything in my way to become God.***

Starting with *him!"*

It's a side of Techno he's never seen before. And it's terrifying.

"If you kill him, I'll shoot you!" Schlatt yells out, his hand shaking. "I won't hesitate to pull this fucking trigger!"

The man laughs in response. "You wouldn't."

"I would!" He shouts again, swallowing. Truth be told, he doesn't know if he would.

"No, you wouldn't. You're too smart to do that."

Techno smirks, savouring his win. "I'm the only hope you have left of making it to the final two. 9 is practically dead. If you were to kill me now, you'd have to face Joko in the final 2. He's a triple 5, and you'll stand no chance. You won't be able to scam your way out of that one."

"But if I keep you alive, that means we'll end up in the finals. You'll kill me without wasting a second. Either way, I'd lose."

Mustering up the acceptance to say the last two words took a lot more effort than he thought. He's going to lose. He knows he will.

There's no way he can become God.

"You don't know that. If you get a kill, you'll unlock your power. That could be enough to kill me."

*Oh, right.*

He almost forgot — Techno has *no idea* that he killed Cooper. After all, the diary didn't reveal who got the kill credit. For some reason.

"That's what I thought." Techno grins, breaking the silence between the two. "Face it, you lost this time. Take the L, nerd."

He turns his head back over to Ty, sending another wave of anxiety surge through Schlatt. Techno holds Ty out over the cliff again, making Schlatt cry out in desperation.

"NO. DON'T DO IT. *DON'T YOU FUCKING DO IT!"*

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***TECHNOBLADE***

All of a sudden, a rush of thoughts run along in Techno's mind as he holds Ty out over the ledge. Thoughts trailing back to earlier on before, when he had gotten the peculiar notification on his phone.

*'Ty. AKA, IAmTy. Born on June 19th, Santiago, U.S. Enjoys playing video games with friends. Dream is to become a youtuber when he gets older so he can inspire others just like how he was inspired. His parents are supportive of his goals. He will do anything he can to help somebody, whether it's a friend or a stranger.'*

He doesn't know why the words had been stuck in his mind, nor why they're only just coming back now — so it makes him wonder.

However, there is one line he's never forgotten reading.

*' But in the end,* ***he's just a kid.*** *'*

The words are written out in bold inside his mind, standing out the most from the rest. Again, he finds himself questioning his true values. Is it right? Is it really right to kill him?

It's like what the diary says. *He's just a kid.* He doesn't deserve to die, not when he has so much waiting for him. It's wrong. It's disgusting.

It's inhumane.

He's not surprised when another inevitable migraine pounds in his head, stopping him from focusing on his train of thought. Who cares. Who cares, right?

Who cares if he's not a player. Who cares if it's inhumane, or if it's wrong. If he's got the balls to drag himself into a game certain of death, then he'll have to grow the balls to face those consequences of the deal *he* signed up for.

A vengeful smile creeps along his face.

"Oops." He yells sarcastically, letting go of the boy in his hand. *"My hand slipped."*

But Schlatt doesn't shoot, like he said he would. Instead, he drops his gun, and his screams echo through the air around them as he crawls up and runs to the ledge.

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**TY**

The world starts to turn a lot slower after Techno releases his grip on him. Without having the time to process anything, Ty's stomach flips upside down as he finds himself falling. Into where? He doesn't know.

Because all he can see below him is darkness.

Darkness. Darkness and silence.

It's scary — Dying. It's a scary thought. He doesn't want to die. Not in the dark. Not in the darkness, all alone around nothing but darkness and silence.

So he opens his mouth and he screams. He screams out because he doesn't want death to take him in the darkness. In the silent darkness.

He screams and screams until his throat is dry and his face is numb.

He stops.

His eyes are shut tight, bracing himself for the impact of the ground below. But it doesn't happen. Instead, he feels his body suddenly jolt still, stopping entirely frozen mid-air. His body grows

light; like a feather.

Slowly, Ty opens his eyes — and he *is* floating still in mid-air.

He opens his palm, and notices there's a blue aura surrounding it...

Wait, no. A blue aura is encircling his entire *body*.

He looks up, and sees a figure floating high up in the air; above the height of the mountain's cliff itself. The silhouette figure has dragon-like wings spread far open, flapping in the air. One of his hands is out-stretched toward the direction of Ty — and coming out from is a light, neon-blue beam of magical aura.

The mountain wind blows violently at Ty, making it feel like his face is ripping off.

"*HUH!?"* Ty yells over the wind, looking up at the figure, who's slowly levitating him higher. As he grows nearer to the figure, his eyes adjust.

No.. *Could it really be..?*

"*YIMF?!"* He calls out again, a sparkle of *hope* glimmering in the corners of his eyes. "*Is that you?!"*

The spirit's silhouetted face spills of tears as he cries out over the top of the wind; his voice is pleading at Ty, almost *begging*.

"I couldn't do it! *I just couldn't."*

His voice sounds painfully familiar.

"*I couldn't let you die. You don't deserve that!"*

His hair blows back by both the harsh breeze of the mountains, and his flapping wings. Techno and Schlatt both stand flummoxed at the ledge of the cliff, staring in shock at the appearance of the mysterious figure. It's Yimf. It's got to be.

And as if reciting a play's script, the spirit calls out in a booming, monotonic voice — his eyes open, revealing a pair of glowing, white pupils.

"***Rule 1 of the Scripture's 5 Rules: The spirit of an assistant will only cease to exist once saving the existence of a human life."***

*What is he talking about?*

***"Breaking a human's future to save their life will be at the cost of your own. Human possession will also result in the same. Rule 1 is forbidden for a spirit as it risks creating a time paradox."***

Then it clicks.

Yimf has broken it. He's broken rule 1. *For Ty*.

"Yimf!!" Ty shrieks. Yimf turns to look at Ty; the spirit's glowing eyes staring straight into his, only making him realise now how

close yet so distant a spirit is compared to a human being.

"You remind me a lot of a friend I used to have." Yimf calls out, his voice sounding more and more strained by the minute. There's a wistful sense of longing laced in his words; like as if there's something he's yearning for. Someone he *misses.* Someone he has missed for a long, long, time.

*"His name was Zak."* Yimf continues. "He was really stubborn. He didn't listen to what people would tell him to do, even if they knew it was for his own good. Just like you. *Maybe that's why things are the way they are now."*

Yimf lowers his voice. *"I was the reason Zak became miserable.* And I don't want that to happen again, not to you. You're just a boy."

Slowly, a ringing sound starts to fill inside Ty's eardrums; the world around him begins to shake, and a white light erupting from Yimf starts to cloud his vision. It's as if he was fading away.

"*Please, Ty!"* He hears Yimg beg out, his voice straying further away from reality itself as Ty's vision starts to blind. "I don't have much time left! *When you wake up, this never happened. You never met Ryan. You never met me.* ***Forget any of this has ever happened."***

No.

*No, I don't want that. I don't want to forget my friend. I don't want to forget Ryan.*

*"Live your life."* Yimf's calls whisper through his mind again — it's all white, now. Everything is white.

*"I'm giving you a second chance. Now live up to it. Become who you want to be. Chase your dreams. Inspire others. And live."*

*Live.*

*Live.*

***Live.***

His eyes snap open as he takes quick, sharp breaths. Ty looks around, and finds himself laying down on concrete paving, beside a large building. It doesn't take him long to quickly realise that he's laying down in front of a very familiar skyscraper building.

*Wait... I live here!*

YMFk sent him back to his home city.

He jolts up, panicked; the memories from the fight with Ryan were still clear as day in his mind — remembering vividly how everything went down, he can still feel his body shake from the terror he was experiencing before. To suddenly wake up back here... It feels almost like a dream.

"No. No!" Ty yells, slapping himself. "That wasn't a dream!

Everything that happened was real!"

But just to make sure, he feels around his arms and legs — there are bruises and cuts from Techno's sword everywhere.

The first thought that comes to his mind is Ryan.

"Ryan!" he yells out loud again, "Ryan's still there! Oh god, oh god, he may die. What do I do?!"

But then he remembers — he remembers a certain somebody who may have the power to help.

Quickly, he rushes to the entrance of the apartment building, running through the doors to inside. As he runs, ignoring the passing by guests inside, he heads straight to the elevator. Fortunately he was alone, and he doesn't waste a second to jab a floor number on the elevator's control panel. The lift shoots up, sending him to the 20th floor. He waits impatiently, tapping his foot on the ground; and then, the doors then slide open — revealing the medic floor where the hospital he tok Ryan to was.

"Dr Halo! If I could just get Dr Halo to come with me, maybe he can help! Maybe he can help bring back Ryan!" He exclaims to himself. As Ty runs frantically, he chases after one of the nurses, who's filling up a plastic cup of water at a filter. He recognises her — she's one of the nurses that works with Dr. Halo!

"Excuse me!" Ty asks, tugging at her coat. "Miss! Where's Dr Halo?"

The nurse turns around quickly, blinking at him. "I'm sorry...?"

"Dr Halo," Ty repeats. "Where is he? Could you tell me where he is? Please?"

But to his utmost surprise, the nurse's face is completely blank.

"I'm... Very sorry.." she mumbles apologetically, "but we don't know any Dr... *Halo* here?"

"Don't you remember?!" Ty panics a little. "You know, the doctor? He had brown eyes... Or was it green? Uh..."

*.. Wait. How did he look again? Did he have black hair? Or blonde? Did he wear anything else?*

"Dr..." he starts, "You don't remember Doctor..."

He cuts himself off, and his mind goes blank.

Wait, what was his name again? Dr... Hart? Harrison? H... Holden?

Horror fills his stomach as he realises he's forgotten. He's forgotten his name.

*What was the Doctor's name again?!*

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# ➳ CHAPTER 42: altrive

**[ play music when you see /// ]**
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**PLAYER NUMBER 15 — JSCHLATT**

Seeing Ty fall had sent his heart tearing into a million pieces, making him scream out like he never has before. But seeing a spirit appear out of thin air, saving his fall with an unexplainable, magical blue aura, had sent himself falling into shock rather than an abyss. Typically, he'd be outraged by Techno — the audacity he has of letting him go, practically *murdering him.* But his anger is suppressed by the much greater emotion of both shock and relief.

The Spirit — or, one of 'God's Assistants' — begins to yell something at Ty. Everybody — Ryan, Techno, and even Schlatt — is frozen, eyes glued to the spirit above.

"*Forget any of this has ever happened!"* the spirit yells out with an urgent torment weaved in his voice. But Schlatt isn't able to see what happens next as his vision suddenly flashes a blinding white. A loud ringing sound erupts from the spirit, growing louder and louder until suddenly everything returns to normal. As Schlatt's eyes adjust, he vaguely sees the Spirit's body shatter into pieces, before disintegrating and becoming one with the wind.

*Did he just sacrifice himself... To save Ty?*

But why? Why would he do that? And isn't a spirit already dead? Where did he go? What happened to him?

But there's one thing Schlatt does know for sure — and that was that the spirit may have been the most selfless *thing* he'd ever seen.

"Ty..?" Schlatt hears a voice croak out from behind. He turns around, and sees Ryan in a crawl-position on the floor, murmuring. His entire face is pecked with scratches, blood and bruises.

Techno then whips back around, snapping out from his daze as his senses become alert again. Ryan notices this, and he quickly acts — grabbing his portal gun beside him, Ryan weakly shoots far away toward another mountain, and shoots a portal below him. He teleports away, both portals quickly closing again so no one could jump in. Techno growls, running over to Schlatt.

"Schlatt! Give me the elytra!" he snaps, but doesn't even wait for his response as he rips off the strapped wings from Schlatt. Schlatt

is left speechless as Technoblade shoves on the Elytra, clipping the straps on, and leaps off the cliff's ledge.

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**PLAYER NUMBER 9 — KRINIOS**

As Ryan falls out the portal onto the hard gravel paving, the portal gun rolls out his grip a few meters away. He tries to crawl back up to stand. But he can't, because his legs give way from underneath.

*Crap, crap, crap, crap, crap.*

His heart races, pounding hard in his chest with stress and pressure. He preps his knees as he starts to desperately crawl towards the gun. His clouded mind spins; swirls of too many mixed thoughts and feelings thump in his head, stopping him from being able to properly focus.

A few feet away from the gun, he reaches out his arm — until the gun is suddenly kicked away.

Ryan looks up and swallows. It's Techno, with a pair of enormous wings strapped over his back. How did he manage to get here so fast?

A foul grin slowly appears on his face.

"You think you could have gotten away with that?" he snarls, kicking the heel of his shoe onto Ryan's wrist. He yelps out, making him stop. "I'm not done with you yet, Number 9."

"No," Ryan croaks out, his voice trembling as he locks eyes with the other's maniacal ones. "*No..."*

"You've been a burden on me for a long, *long* time now." Techno hisses, kicking the boy to turn him over and lay on his back. "You were meant to be dead. *Why are you even still alive?* You're unnecessarily dragging on this game. You should have stopped stalling for the inevitable the second you crashed into that skyscraper."

Ryan tries to struggle, except he's pinned down by Techno's foot on his chest. No. It can't end like this. *It can't.*

"But I feel a little bad," Techno rambles intimidatingly on. "For leaving you separated from your dead teammate. What was his name? Altrive?"

*"Shut up!"* Ryan spits. *"Just shut up. Stop talking!"*

*Please stop talking.*

*He's not just a dead teammate. He's my friend. And he's alive. He'll always be alive, in my heart.*

Techno slowly pulls out his sword from his sheath, unravelling the grappling hook's zipline tied around it.

"I'll do you a favour, 9," he announces, uncoiling the last of the zipline. "Think of your death more as a... *Tribute.* I'll make a Tribute dedicated for you to Altrive."

The tip of the blade reaches Ryan's neck slyly. He gulps, shaking as he feels the cold sword make contact with his skin.

"A slit across the neck." Techno says. "I'll let you go out, just like he did. That way, it can feel like you've *both* died together. *Isn't that symbolic?"*

And slowly, Ryan can feel the blade slide smoothly along his neck; small streams of his blood dribbling down the sliced wound.

"I hope you had a Krinios day, *Ryan."*

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*///*

His body grows numb as the sword slices along his neck. Ryan chokes, spluttering out blood as he feels himself die.

*I'm dying.*

...

And that's when he realises.

When he realises something.

He's never let him down. He'd never, *ever* let Altrive down.

All his life, he never understood it — he never understood how it felt to be *free.* He never understood what was out there, waiting for him. He never had any friends, nor anyone to rely on either. He was always on his own ever since he was a kid, and that's what he had always taught himself as he grew older. That he'll always be alone.

So that's why he had never known what hope really was.

The day he got his eye stabbed out — he could only describe that feeling as a feeling of hope *and* freedom. At least, what he could feel like was closest to that. Maybe the thought of finally seeing the outside world, seeing actual *people* was a wonder to him.

But that was a long time ago.

After he received the message from God regarding the game, he woke up to find himself in the middle of nowhere — far away from his house.

He always assumed it was to make it easier for him to participate. But he doesn't think that's why anymore.

Instead, he thinks that happened so he could have been given a chance to finally discover real freedom. Maybe this was God's way of telling him that. And meeting both Altrive and Ty finally made him see that.

What Altrive would have wanted from Ryan wasn't to win. It

wasn't to become God — but if he did, that was just a bonus anyway.
But rather, all he wanted was for Ryan to experience *true* freedom. To know what *true* hope is.
And he has.

Hope does exist — it had existed within him all this time. He just never knew it.

What had driven him forward may have been Altrive and Ty on the outside, but on the inside, the roots of it all was the longing for freedom and the yearning for peace. And that was more than enough to give him hope.

*Now, I can die knowing that. I can die knowing what it is. How it feels. I can die knowing...*
*That I **did** make Altrive proud.*

He lived. He *managed* to *really live*.

And for the first time in a while, he can feel his eye twinkle — just like that night when he lost his other eye. It's the same feeling; a feeling of relief, finally being able to let go without being burdened by the weight of his regrets and solitude.

He's never felt more alive in his life. How ironic.

*Thank you God. For letting me die like this. Thank you for saving Ty. Thank you for letting me meet Altrive. And thank you for letting me live.*

A small smile of relief curls along his mouth, and he lets his eye close.

He's not dying alone like he always thought he would — He's not dying miserable, or trapped, or in pain, or broken. But he's dying relieved. He's dying knowing that he's not alone, knowing that he's free, knowing that hope *does* and *will* still exist. Knowing that he's healed.

Reality starts to slip away from him.

He reaches out his hand with his last ounce of strength. And he swears, just a split second before falling into eternal oblivion — he swears he can see Altrive there, taking his hand in his.

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Techno drops his sword to the ground beside him as he stands over Ryan's body. His adrenalized veins are pumping through his skin, and his head is woozy with the rush of blood.

He blinks slowly, processing what had just happened. Then suddenly, he gasps; his eyes dullen, it's crazed vibrance disappearing, and he covers his mouth.

*"I killed him!"* he exclaims, and looks down at his shaking hands that are plastered with blood. He *killed* him.

*That's not what Cooper would have wanted. That's not what Schlatt would have wanted.*

"What have I done?!" he yells out, grabbing locks of his hair as he pulls it aggressively in his hands. "*We were meant to stick together!!*"

His hands shoot back to clasp his mouth. His stomach churns.

Then he wobbles to the side away from Ryan's dead body, doubling over as he throws up on the ground.

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**PLAYER NUMBER 13 — JOKO**

A tired groan slips out from his mouth as he stares out into the vast sunset beyond the valleys. If he's being honest, he's been feeling a little homesick for the past few days.

His head's been hurting ever since his mind created the figures of his torment — *the goobers.* It took him a while before he realised that they were just figments of his own imagination that have been personified by what he can only describe is his trauma.

*I mean, I'm a murderer. I killed people. I guess I deserve that, huh?*

The buzz coming from his phone snaps him out from that.

***USER 9'S** NECK HAS BEEN SLIT BY **USER 1***
***USER 9 HAS REACHED A DEAD END.***

So that Ryan guy finally died, huh? Of course it was by Techno.

He blinks to himself in disbelief — he actually did it. He made it to the top 3. It's so crazy for him to see that he's come so far.

*Schlatt and Techno are his last remaining rivals now, aren't they?*

In that case, going by the assumption they're still teamed, Joko's outnumbered. Unless he can figure out a way to turn Schlatt over to his side, or to break him apart from Technoblade, then he'd have to 1v2 them both.

That's if he's taking the offense route. Or, if he wanted to play defensive, then he'd try break Schlatt and Techno away from their alliance. But that's unlikely.

Schlatt's been with him the entire game — he's even *betrayed* Joko at one point earlier on. He'd be a fool to listen to Joko — much less fall for anything he has planned, especially given he's quite intelligent. Techno, on the other hand, is a complete lost cause. The man's out of his mind. He's genuinely surprised Schlatt's still alive.

*... Or perhaps, he's saving him until there's 2 left. Then he'll attack.*

Joko groans again, burying his head in his hands.

*What can I do?*

There's only so much he *can* do. But it's up to him on which *choice* he'll pick. After all, one mistake could lead him to his

uneventful, fateful death.

And he can't die. He just *can't.* For her.

She's been the only thing really driving him forward: *Amanda.* The girl he's loved ever since elementary.

He then gets another message on his phone:

***CONGRATULATIONS NUMBER 13 FOR MAKING IT TO THE TOP 3!***
***JUST A REMINDER THAT YOUR CATCHPHRASE AND SPECIAL ABILITY IS STILL AVAILABLE***
***THE BOUNTY ON TECHNOBLADE IS NOW CLOSED. NO MORE BOUNTY ANYMORE.LAST 3 PLAYERS REMAINING: NUMBER 1, 15, 13 (YOU)***

The bounty?

Oh, yeah! He almost forgot about the bounty. It was bound to have been called off, anyway. If the bounty *was* still on, then the final two can agree to kill Techno and leave the other to win the game. Fair play on God's behalf.

Not that Joko was ever intending on killing the bounty. He doesn't want to be free of the game — he wants to become *God.* No, he *needs* to become God.

He clutches his hand, balling it into a tight fist. He's made it so far, and he can't afford to lose it all now.

No way in fucking *hell* he can't. If he did, he'll never be able to forgive himself.

Just then, he gets a final buzz from his phone. He checks it.

His heart stops.

He shoots up to stand. And he runs.

✧×□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□×✧
**ONLY THE FINAL 3 REMAIN**

# ➳ CHAPTER 43: the final 3

**THE FINAL 3:**
**NUMBER 1.**
**NUMBER 13.**
**NUMBER 15.**
✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧
**[ if you can and wanna, then I recommend listening to music throughout the whole chap :) ]**
✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧
**TECHNOBLADE**

The blood-lust glare in his eyes disappears, replaced with the inevitable pounding of his empty head. Another migraine. Awesome.

He wipes his mouth, standing back up. He glances at 9's body again; it's covered in blood, and it sends a shiver up Techno's spine.

Oh, right. He almost forgot about Schlatt. He must still be waiting at the mountain.

He turns away from the body, then hearing his phone buzz in his pockets. He ignores it, already knowing what it is – *9's death message.*

Techno clenches his fist, sucking in a deep breath before running to the closest ledge he can find. He leaps off, diving down to gain momentum before aiming up; and within no time, he's flying through the air towards Schlatt.

Reaching him, he lands gracefully onto the mountain, and sees Schlatt sitting there with his phone in hand.

"Congratulations 15 for making it to top 3." Schlatt reads out monotonously, turning to look up at Techno. "You *killed* him."

"I had to," Technoblade replies. The reality of it all suddenly hits him — they were *actually top 3.* They made it.

The only person left now... Is Joko.

It's crazy to think how much different things were when the game first started, let alone before it even happened. The thought of knowing that there used to be 15 people — 15 people who were well and truly *alive*, scared for their lives and doing everything in their power to survive. Whether it was to become God, or to survive for another motive. Now 12 of them are dead.

12 humans with their futures robbed and freedoms taken away

from them. Dead, they are. All of them, dead because some God made them kill each other for power. What was it all for in the end? Trying so hard only to fail. If you know you're weak and you're going to die, what's the point in fighting?

Poke. Ted. Cooper. Sneeg. CaptainSparklez. Carson. Wilbur. Altrive. Connor. AntVenom. Travis. And Ryan.

What was the point in any of this?

*Did they really deserve it?*

"Techno." Schlatt says, snapping him out from his daze. He speaks with a serious tone. "There's something I've been thinking about for a while."

"And what's that?"

Schlatt sighs. "Well, about what we're going to do. If by the off chance we do make it to top 2, what's going to happen? Do we just kill each other? Because both you and I know damn-fucking-well that I'll lose *that* gamble."

"I can fight you with my fists instead?" Techno offers.

"No, that's not what I mean," Schlatt quickly says. He swallows, the words on his tongue hesitating to slip out. "I'm saying I think... Well. I think it's best for us... *If we split up."*

He blinks in disbelief. "Huh?"

"We'll go our separate ways to take down 13," Schlatt continues, "if you die, you're shit. If I die, I'm shit. And if 13 dies... He's shit, and I'm fucked. But either way, the fate of the game will be a little less predictable."

He holds out his hand to Techno, offering a deal to him. He looks into his eyes, with a serious tone.

"So let me get this straight," Techno says slowly, averting his gaze down from Schlatt's eyes to his hand. "Our alliance *is no more?"*

"Starting from when we separate... Yes."

Techno stops, and thinks about this for a moment. They're already too far into the game now. The alliance will no longer serve him any use. Technically, he can snap his neck right here, right now. After all, it would only benefit him. He could completely eliminate Schlatt using the bare minimum of energy required, leaving him to fight only against Joko, a player who may outrank him in terms of teamwork and intelligence — but what will matter in the end will be their brute force and power.

He can do that. He can do it, easy.

But he won't.

Techno unstraps his wings, and throws them onto the ground in front of Schlatt.

"Well here, this is yours, after all," Techno grunts. He unclenches and clenches his fist, looking down. "Farewell, Jschlatt."

Schlatt purses his lips, strapping the Elytra onto himself. He walks over to the ledge of the cliff, and whispers back.

"Until next time, Technoblade."

His heart tears a little as he hears this.

✧ ⋎ ◦ ✖ ◦ ⋏ ✧

**SCHLATT**

This is it. This is really it.

His mind whirrs he glides through the chilling air; the brilliant cyan skies fading into a honey-golden tint, as the sunset wraps the day in its golden-pink blanket. Schlatt's chocolate brown hair dances in the wind and blows over his face as he flies.

For the first time in this messed up game, he's alone. Connor's no longer with him. Now Techno isn't, either.

But it's for the best, right? To split paths. To go their own ways. Sticking together to take down Joko would mean Schlatt would have to face Techno as the final 2 remaining players. And to be truthful, he isn't ready for that – nor probably ever will. At least now he might have a *real* chance at winning.

*BUZZ*!

His phone buzzes in his pocket. Crap! What is it now?

Schlatt's eyes dart to the ground below him – he's flying just over the plains, separated with an enchanting forest behind them. He aims low to land, and then tumbles not-so-graciously onto the grassy fields. Rolling to the ground, his phone bounces out from his pocket and into a pile of dirt. Schlatt groans, and stretches out his arm to retrieve his now covered-in-mud device (to his relief, it still works). Turning the device on, he blows off the dirt on the screen so he can read his messages more clearly.

Slowly, he reads the message, wishing that he hadn't blown the dirt off the screen at all:

**DEAD END**

*No. No no no no no no no no no no no NO NO NO.*

"Are you fucking me right now?!" he exclaims.

*Dead end!?* Was splitting up with Techno the wrong thing to do after all?!

Schlatt's breathing picks up. He's going to die, isn't he? He can't defend himself for *shit*. He's a 1/5 in strength. *1/5!* The last two people are both a five! How's he meant to outlast them in a fight?

*No, calm down. Think, Jschlatt, think. What can you do?*

The only possible remaining people he can die from is Techno or Joko. But a dead end means a death, right? Can is perhaps be a cause of death by something that *isn't* human...?

Even so, there's not much that can give him an answer to that. No, he'll have to resort to the first option.

Say if his upcoming death *is* by the cause of another player, it can only be Technoblade or Joko.

*Hmmm.*

This can only go two ways:

1). Techno's the cause. He'll descend into his own illusion of madness and track him down and slit his throat with no mercy. He's done it twice before, and he won't hesitate to do it again. He'll soon figure out there's no use in keeping him alive anymore. Especially with the alliance off.

Or, 2) Joko's the cause. Maybe this entire time Joko had been tracking him down. And he'll get a surprise attack from him, resulting in a quick but probably painful death.

*I'm not liking my choices so far. God fucking dammit, is there even a way I can make it out of here alive?*

... Wait. Maybe there *is* a way.

He's might be a 1 in strength, and an average 3 in teamwork, but there *is* one quality that exceeds them both:
Intelligence. With that comes manipulation.

It's something he's been meaning to put behind in the past for a *long while.* He swore to himself — to his *morals* — that his manipulating, scheming side of him was gone for good, buried deep within his past self.

... But he's left with no other choice. Isn't he?

Schlatt bites his lip, and crawls up steadily from the ground. He's starting to get used to his wooden leg, but it's still wobbly. He types out on his phone:

*'I WANT TO MAKE A BARGAIN.*
*WHAT DO I GIVE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT JOKO?'*

...

*YOUR GRAPPLING HOOK.*

The price for information is his grappling hook? He expected much worse — he supposes after losing an entire leg, there can't be much that's worse.

Like c'mon, a *grappling hook?* That's nothing.

Jschlatt reaches to his holster and rips out his grappling gun; he chucks it on the ground, and aims the phone's camera at the object.

He presses the SNAPSHOT button, and a white flash with the symbol of a crown flashes onto the gun. Within a few seconds, the gun disintegrates, and he hears a buzz on his phone:

***DEAL PAID.***

*JOKO.BORN: APRIL 1ST, U.S*
*AGE: 18YRS*
*ADDRESS: 35 WESTWALE ROAD.*
*HAS A GIRLFRIEND NAMED "AMANDA", AND HAS BEEN TOGETHER WITH HER SINCE EARLY SCHOOL YEARS. THEY STARTED DATING 3 YEARS AGO. JOKO LOVES HER A LOT. THAT'S WHY HE'S NOT GIVING UP ON WINNING.*
*HE KNOWS HOW IT FEELS LIKE TO BE ALL ALONE. SHE KNOWS HOW IT FEELS LIKE TO BE ALL ALONE.T*
*HERE'S NOTHING MORE HE WANTS THAN TO PROTECT HER AND MAKE HER FEEL LIKE SHE'S LOVED.*
*HE DOESN'T WANT POWER. HE WANTS SAFETY.*
***HIS MOTIVE IS TO BECOME GOD AND FULFIL HIS PROMISE HE MADE TO HER. HIS PROMISE OF COMING BACK HOME.***
***HIS PROMISE OF NEVER LEAVING HER SIDE***

*That's why he wants to become God.*

It takes him a bit to process that. Could Joko have not been a bad person after all?

No. Of course not. Because in this game — in this *world:*
*What can be possibly define as being a bad person now?*

They had all hurt people in the end. Each one of them. Aren't they all just as bad as each other? Isn't Schlatt just as bad as him?

BUZZ!

*ALSO, HE'S 20M AWAY FROM YOU. ENGAGING IN FIGHT SOON.*

"Wait, what?!" he exclaims. A rustle from the bushes of the forest's entrance behind him snaps him to his senses. He jerks around.

A man with a cracked mask; matted blonde-pink hair, looking like a birds nest; torn clothing and bloody hands; emerges and runs out from the blankets of trees toward him.

- - - - -

Schlatt doesn't have any time to think before Joko leaps onto him, sending them both rolling down the plains hill. With an arm around Schlatt's neck, Joko chokes him as he seethes.

"*Splitting apart from your friend was a mistake!"*

His voice is unsettling shaky; and Schlatt can feel his body quiver

slightly. He yells out, struggling against his forceful clutches.

"LET GO OF ME!" Schlatt shrieks, kicking about. With one hand around his neck, Joko uses the other to snatch his pistol from his pocket. He pounds the metal gun into Schlatt's cheekbone, and pins him to the ground as he's ontop of him.

"You're going to die," Joko hisses as the man. "*And I'm going to win! I HAVE TO WIN! I NEED TO WIN!"*

Schlatt kicks his knee into Joko's crotch, sending a grunt out of the man grunts in response. His grip doesn't loosen on him. Joko's hand shoots to grasp Schlatt's neck, while the other on the handle of the handgun. He brings the muzzle to Schlatt's forehead.

No. No this can't end. Not now.

The gun cocks.

*"Wait!!"*

Schlatt barely manages to yell, and Joko pauses.

"You have 3 seconds to convince me not to shoot you." Joko scoffs. "3..."

*Think. Think, think, think.*

"2... 1—"

*He's got it. He's devised a plan.*

"Amanda."

Joko stops. He lowers his gun a little, still clenched tightly in his hand. "... *What?"*

Schlatt opens his mouth to talk, but chokes. Joko realises this, and he slowly lets go of Schlatt's neck.

"You don't want me to kill you, Joko." Schlatt croaks out.

"Why's that?" Joko responds.

Schlatt stares at him for a solid few seconds, before speaking again.

"I know all about you," Schlatt continues, assertiveness dominating in his voice. "I know all about Amanda. And I know all about your *little fucking promise you made to her."*

Joko shakes his head slowly, as if mesmerised. "No... No, you don't. You don't know *anything."*

"You promised her you'd come back home."

Joko goes silent. Schlatt takes this as the opportunity to continue.

"You want to protect her because you know that she can't protect herself. She *needs* you. And you need her, just as badly."

A dawning silence hangs in the air. The man's hand shakes ever so slightly, loosening his grip on his pistol. He doesn't speak. The daunting face of Joko's cracked mask glares into the windows to Schlatt's soul.

"I know how it feels like to feel like you're all alone." Schlatt whispers, and this time he's speaking with honesty.

He's always felt alone, in his past. He's robbed people of their futures — he's scammed, he's manipulated, he's lied. He's a terrible human. And while he did all that for money on the outside, the *real* reason he's ever done that was to try cease his never-ending, constant feeling of solitude. Born with nothing, been a nothing — he's never had anything to lose.

*"To feel like everyones turned your back against you because life fucked you over,"* Schlatt continues. "... I know you, Joko. I know you and I know Amanda, and I know that feeling. I know how it feels like to need love. Love — the strongest form of willpower. You don't care about power, or being God. But if it means you'll be able to keep her safe, you'll do whatever it takes. *Whatever it takes to protect her."*

But with honesty comes with deception. He needs to be honest but lie at the same time — he needs to get past his head and into his heart.

Joko starts to sniff, and he opens his mouth.

"... *I couldn't let her know where I was going,"* he chokes out on his soft sobs. "She'll follow me and she'll get herself into this messed up situation..."

He pauses, and breathes out slowly. "The night before I left.. She told me if I never came back, to go to the post office. So for the first few weeks every day I'd run to the post office just to check if she ever wrote me anything. And she did. She mailed me a note. And I read it, one night. I read it and I lost myself and I couldn't take it. I... I know I'm meant to stay strong for her..."

He swallows; and through the small crevices of his mask, Schlatt can see his eye. It glimmers a diamond blue, as fear flickers in his pupils.

*"... But I'm scared."*

Schlatt holds his breath. *"I know that."*

There it is again — that silence. It hangs there for a while longer, until Joko breaks it again.

"Why could I keep you alive, Schlatt?"

It's time. He knew he'd be asked this one point or another — and so, he puts his plan to action.

"35 Westwale Road." Schlatt tells him, sending another wave of shock to the man. "I planted explosives under your house a week ago."

"W... What?" Joko utters.

"I can detonate it right this second if I want to, but I won't." Schlatt bribes. "Keep me alive. Keep me alive and kill Blade. *And I swear to you that she'll be safe. Forever."*

Joko's voice breaks as he murmurs. "Y-You can't detonate it.

She'll... *She'll die."*

"Then take me to the final two, Joko. Take me, kill me, and you win. You'll win, and you'll be able to protect her."

He points to the gun in Joko's hand.

*"But bring that gun up and put a bullet through my head* — You won't *ever* get the chance to see her again. *You don't want to take that risk, don't you? You wouldn't want to risk killing me if it means she'll die."*

So Joko puts down the gun. And Schlatt's phone buzzes.

# ➳ CHAPTER 44: SHOWDOWN

**NOTE: This chapter is the longest one I've made, averaging up to 4k words. I just wanna apologise (again yes ik) for how LONG IT IS UGHASDJK !! Anyways hopefully that isn't too much of a bother ^^;;**

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

**[ suggestion: play music at the [ /// ] dont mind the ost hehe]**

**SCHLATT**

Joko lowers the gun, and gets up from Schlatt, releasing him from his grip. Schlatt's phone also buzzes, and he quickly checks it: It's the dead end message — fading away.

It worked. His plan worked.

"Good choice. I'll be off now," Schlatt remarks, trying to push himself up. Struggling with his wooden leg, Joko offers his hand. He grabs it gratefully, and gets pulled up to his feet.

Leaving the masked man speechless, Schlatt dashes off into the distance of the fields. Pulling the straps of his Elytra, he runs up a hill and jumps off, flying away.

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**JOKO**

He can feel a solemn tear roll down his cheek. Silenced by 15's words, he stands still as evening dawns over the setting skies.

*"You should've killed him."*

He jumps, startled by the sudden blood-curtling hiss. He jerks around and sees them, sitting on the ground behind him. The Goobers.

"No.." Joko croaks, gripping his pistol tightly in hand, readying it. "Not you again."

*"He's going to backstab you, just like what you did Daddy,"* the goober chants, running up to Joko as it tugs on his trousers. *"Just like how you backstabbed Wilbur Soot and Travis."*

Joko backs away, stumbling and shaking his head. "He's not going to do that."

*"He's going to kill Amanda."*

"No he's not!!" Joko yells, and he pulls the trigger at the creature. Blasting gunshots rattle the atmosphere as he shoots, sending crows flying out from hidden trees. The bullets go through the goobers;

but he doesn't care. He shoots again, and again, and again. And he keeps shooting, stumbling back as he does so each time.

"He's probably already detonated it, the bomb." The goober smiles. "He's probably—"

"*SHUT UP!!*" he snaps again, turning around as he runs toward the direction of the looming forest. *"Just go away! Get out! GET OUT OF MY HEAD! GET OUT!"*

Just like what had happened before, the creatures send him running for his life. Shoving the pistol in his holster, he holds out both his hands as he swats through the trees of the woods.

* * *

*"I miss her. I can't help but think it's my fault."*

*Her whispers were almost inaudible by her choking sobs. Her room had felt much more colder than it usually felt; an eery, melancholic atmosphere filled the bedroom. There she lay, her head on the lap of the boy as she cried, clutching his shirt.*

*"Amanda..." he whispered, running a hand through her hair as he gently caressed her.*

*"I should have been there for her!"*

*"It's not your fault, Amanda." He closed his eyes, holding back the tears of his own as he comforted her. His voice was deep but understanding. "There's nothing you could have done to save her from cancer."*

*"But she was my mother, Joko!" she cried, "I should have stayed in the hospital. I... I should have never left to live here. I should have stayed with her when she needed me the most..."*

*"It's not your fault. She was meant to have gone on for at least 3 more months. No one could predict her sudden passing. Don't blame yourself, please."*

*He pulled her into a tight hug, wrapping her into an embrace as she put her head in his chest. More wrecking sobs erupted from her. It tore him. And he hated it, seeing her like this.*

*"I-I'm sorry.." she mumbled; her voice trembled, weak from her sobs. "I just... feel so alone."*

*"You're not alone, baby," Joko whispered, cupping her face in both his hands. "You have me. I promise I'll never leave you. I promise...*

***... That you'll never feel alone again."***

* * *

He's snapped out of his flashback as he almost slips on a pile of leaves. He regains his balance, sprinting unsteadily.

*I can't kill Technoblade. Not now, I've to go find Amanda. I have to go meet her at the park like she said. Just like what she wrote on the note. I have to see her. No, I need to see her before I—*

He trips over a piece of rock in his way, stumbling forward into a

set of trees; evening now settled in, the sky begins to darken to nighttime. It doesn't help that the moonless night is rid of stars, too. It's completely pitch-black.

As Joko bangs into a tree, he wobbles to the side. He tries to relocate his direction, attempting to break into another jog. Instead, he trips over another bush, and tumbles down a hill hitting trees, twigs and various other rocks as he rolls down. His face slams into the head of a boulder — fortunately, his mask shields him from most of the damage. Unfortunately, his mask cracks completely, shattering into pieces as it falls off his face. Blood starts to dribble from his nose, and Joko suddenly realises how *cold* he is.

He hugs himself, teeth chattering. His arms are bloody and scratched from the twigs he tumbled over; his face is plastered with cuts and wounds; and his bloodshot eyes chafed from crying. He splutters out, spitting blood onto the ground as he coughs hoarsely. His body shakes.

*I'm going insane. I'm going insane. I'm going insane.*

His mind spins and his head aches. He clutches himself tighter, and sits up.

*Calm down. Take deep breaths, Joko. Calm down. You're going to find her. You're not going to die, not yet.*

He shoves a hand in his pocket, digging for his phone. He pulls it out, turning it on; the bright light contrasts from the darkness, and he blinks hard for a bit before his focus adjusts. He reads his screen.

*I just have to hold on.*

He puts the phone back in his pocket, and gets up again.

✧ ◡ ⊰ ✖ ⊱ ◡ ✧

He's been running for what feels like hours; endless trails of towering trees and bushes surrounding him. But he's desperate to see her — it'll be a few more hours until sunrise. If he could just meet her there...

Joko's vision then pinpoints onto something far away in the distance through the gaps of the trees ahead of him — it looks to be some sort of monumental facility. Perhaps it holds something useful.

He sprints over, feet flying over the leaves as his shoes pounded on the dirt path.

As he nears closer to the building, he notices it's actually a massive, abandoned, concrete-haunted-looking warehouse. It looks to be partially in ruins — Two storeys high, the ceiling looking to be around 15m high with it's second story being an open rooftop, exposed to the night sky.

Joko runs inside through a broken window, leaning against a stone pillar to catch his breath. He wipes his bloody face, sucking in

deep breaths of air as he shuts his eyes.

*"Yo, Joko."*

His entire body stops. What was that voice? Where did it come from?

He opens his eyes, and looks ahead.

Standing 50 metres at the otherside of the warehouse — holding a bloodied sword in hand — is Number 1. Technoblade.

✧ ⊰ ⊱ ✖ ⊰ ⊱ ✧

**TECHNOBLADE**

The boy looks up at him, and for the first time Techno sees he's not wearing his mask. Too far to tell his exact expression, he *does* notice his forehead and nose leaking of blood; and his dirty-blonde-pinkish hair was an unruly, tangled mess. His posture is a lot more timid and weaker than usual, and he senses his sudden disappearance of his cocky attitude. Overall, he looks like he just came from WWI.

"Yo, Joko." Techno calls out, a smug grin appearing over his face. He wipes a drop of blood from his mouth with his sleeve. "Glad to see you again."

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he growls from the other side.

"I'm here to end this one and for all," Techno smirks, flipping his sword in hand. "What else?"

A buzz on both their phones cuts their small-talk short:

*THIS IS YOUR FINAL SHOWDOWN BETWEEN YOU BOTH. ONE MIGHT DIE AND ONE MIGHT SURVIVE — OR BOTH MIGHT DIE! WHO KNOWS? ANYWAYS, I DECIDED I WANTED TO MAKE THIS DRAMATIC SO I CAN ENJOY MY POPCORN. SOO, OUTFIT UPGRADE!*

Suddenly, his entire body begins to glow a white aura — especially his clothes. A transformation takes place, and he finds that his clothes are merging.

Slowly, a flowing, red royal-like cloak appears on him; white gloves slide onto his hands from thin air; his white polo shirt clears of blood stains, and his shoes turn to boots.

Likewise for Joko, he also starts to glow. He's wearing a black jumpsuit with a long, dark green cloak. Dark green gloves cover his hands, and boots also appear on him. For some reason, exactly half his face is covered with a mask.

"Wait, my gun!" Joko exclaims, reaching to his waist where his holsters once were. "It's gone! What the fuck, God?!"

A sword appears on the floor in front of him. "Oh."

Techno blinks. "So are we anime characters now?"

His phone buzzes again:

*ALWAYS HAVE BEEN*

He sighs, and tucks his phone in his pocket, readying his stance as he grips his sword.

*Well there's no holding back anymore. It's do or die.*

So he charges forward.

- - - -

Rapier in hand, he raises his weapon up high as it's metal blade intertwines with Joko's. A *chlash* rings in his ears, followed by a sharp tug of his opponent's sword. Joko's never really handled a sword before, but considering his high rank in his strength, he picks it up quite fast.

Techno twists his sword, and jabs it toward Joko's waist; Joko jumps up in response, dodging the attack as he lands behind Techno. Techno whips around a split second before Joko's sword slashes across the air — just missing him by a hair's strand.

Techno ducks down, rotating his grip on his weapon as he brings it down to Joko's legs. With a swift slice, he manages to cut through his right leg — only for him to be kicked in the chin right after. The slice cuts through his jumpsuit, and his leg starts to leak with small dribbles of blood.

Techno falls back, giving Joko the perfect opportunity to take advantage of him. But luckily, his quick reflexes kick in — and he rolls over to the side just before almost making contact with the tip of his enemy's blade. As Joko hacks the sword at his face, Techno spins around and kicks himself up, blocking the attack with his own sword.

They both raise their swords, and strike again; the blood-plastered metal colliding with one another in dramatic elegance.

Techno growls, and twists his entire arm so that the sword can strike in a different direction. He aims it at his neck, trying to lacerate his blade through his skin when Joko's sword unexpectedly strikes him in the chest. He looks down, and notices that there's a tear through his clothes, and his chest is bleeding from a shallow slit-wound. He slices again, making a gash across Techno's face.

He looks up again at Joko, smirking as he lands his own blow at him. Joko's too slow this time, and he manages to make another tear across his arm.

"Don't get so hasty there." Techno snarls, his sword clashing in with the other's once again. But unlike his usual character, Joko doesn't respond.

Techno notices his bloodshot, cobalt eye — on the unmasked side of his face — flicker with uncertainty and uneasiness. Like for a split second, he saw something *terrifying*. Or perhaps, he saw

something that holds him back.

Joko's grip on his sword then slips for the first time, causing him to properly fall onto his back, along with another gash being marked across his forehead. His sword falls beside him, out of his grip. This isn't like him. The determined fire that was always lit up inside him everytime he'd fight — it isn't there.

*It's almost as if he doesn't want to fight me.*

Nonetheless, Techno takes as much advantage of this as he can. He runs over to Joko, whose laying on the ground, and aims his sword at the centre of his face.

"It's over now." Techno grins. Joko lays still, his eyes unwavering. And then he opens his mouth.

"*Goblin check."*

Suddenly, everything flashes white.

- - - -

He recognises that flash immediately. The special ability. That must have been his catchphrase.

Just as soon as it happened, everything returns back to normal — except things *aren't* normal. Techno finds himself sprawled out on the ground a few metres away from Joko. The impact must have sent him flying back.

Suddenly, small, green, glowing creatures begin to rise up from the ground — maybe 10 in total? He's not sure.

Joko looks a mixture of mortified and shocked.

"*You guys?!"* he exclaims. It seems like he's met them before. His voice trembles. *"Goobers?!"*

"We'll help you kill him daddy!" they all chant; their eyes are black chasms, and their smiles are menacing and cruel. They're about a quarter of Techno's height, but they run at him with a speed he hasn't dared to ever imagine. Techno shoots up to his feet, grabbing his sword as he aims it at the creatures — or, 'goobers', as what Joko had called them.

The goobers latch onto Techno, clawing at his skin. The boy swings his sword at them in response, knocking them off of him. But they don't die, nor disappear — instead, they'd rip in half for a split second before merging back whole again.

*How?!*

Joko stumbles up to his feet, distressed; eyes darting left and right, trying to look for a place to escape to. Over to the left side of the warehouse is a staircase leading up to the rooftop. He doesn't hesitate to break into a sprint in that direction.

"Where do you think *you're* going?" Techno howls, kicking the goobers off of him as he tries to chase after Joko. Two of them latch

again onto his legs, crawling up to his back. A yell slips from his throat, and he rams his back into a pillar, causing the creatures to topple off. He slashes his sword at them threateningly for a bit, before turning around to run up the stairs.

He makes it to the rooftop, and it's massive. 15 meters high into the air — if he were to fall off, he'd break a few bones for sure. The actual rooftop — about 50x50 metres.

Joko's kneeling the other end with his sword in hand, catching his breath.

The moonless, crepuscular sky is almost completely pitch black. The haunting air sends chills down his spine.

Technoblade's about to charge at him when one of the goobers suddenly jump at his face, scratching him in the eye.

"*Get off me!"* Techno shrieks, stumbling back and swatting them off. He drops his sword, and the guardian-acting creatures pick it up, snapping it in half. His face droops in horror.

"My sword!!"

Thinking fast, he tries to view another way out of this — there, 15 metres away are large, stacked boxes, sitting on the rooftop's paving. He darts over to it, the goobers trailing behind. Palms slamming down onto the box, he heaves himself up, and climbs over on top of the boxes. He's about 5 metres higher from the rooftop's level. The goobers struggle to climb up, buying him more time to think.

"I didn't want to fight you, Technoblade." Joko finally remarks, voice faltering a little. Regained his breath, he stands back up again and turns around, facing Techno. "I... Didn't want this to happen."

Techno's hair dances in the night's breeze, despite it slapping him across the face.

"Then what did you want, Joko?" is all he calls out. "What the *fuck* did you want?"

Silence. Except from the muffled clawing of the goobers as they try to climb the boxes.

Techno stands there, still, waiting for Joko's response. But he remains silent, unsure how to answer.

He looks down, and notices that the goobers are crawling nearer.

Then suddenly it clicks — he knows what to do.

How could he have forgotten about *his* catchphrase? What was it... Oh, right!

He cracks another malicious grin, and holds out his hand, bending low as he whispers.

*"Blood for the Blood God."*

There's a bright flash.

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In his open palm, something begins to appear; starting off as specks of sparks, the atoms eventually fuse together, merging to create a long weapon to wield.

And bang — once the final piece of his tool comes together, Techno's hand grips tight around the weapon as it glows in his hand.

It's...

He feels something maul at his ankle, and jerks around only to find that the goobers have made it up on the box. Quickly, he steps back, and spontaneously swings his axe at the creatures. But to his surprise — as soon as the axe's blade comes in contact with the goober's skin, the creatures diminish into flecks of ashes.

*So this isn't any ordinary axe.*

Catching onto this ability, he whips around at Joko, and ditches the axe his way. Joko clenches both his fists and raises them up in front of his face in retaliation, when suddenly he summons more of the creatures in his way — the creatures block the attack of the axe, dying in his place. The axe clanks to the floor.

*Interesting. He can summon them by raising his arms up.*

Techno holds out his hand, not thinking as he leaps off the tower of boxes; like as if he knew it would happen, the axe glows vibrantly before loyally zooming back into his open palm.

Clutching tight onto the axe's handle, he does a 360 in the air before landing effortlessly onto the concrete rooftop.

He raises the axe in the air, prepping to attack when Joko yells, summoning another horde of goobers.

"Your *tactic* won't work for long!" Techno remarks charging at the creatures as he swings his axe. With each brisk hit, the goobers would disintegrate; only to be replaced by another torrent of them.

He jumps up over a group of creatures, slashing his axe across until they all diminish. He jerks to Joko, whose running along the rooftop a few meters ahead of him, summoning more of the creatures, not wasting a second of using his unlocked ability.

Techno kicks his feet in an angle that makes him slide along the concrete, aiming his axe at Joko. He raises his arms, and strikes down, only to miss and hit another goober instead. Techno halts in his place as another one latches again onto his leg.

He kicks it off, and spins around — there's a massive group of summoned goobers running toward him, trying to distract him from Joko. He throws his axe at them, resulting in the last remaining goobers to split up and separate.

**[/// ]**

Joko circles around Techno as he then runs up behind him with his sword in hand, readying himself for another melee attack. He yells, bringing his sword up to Techno as his axe clashes with his. Techno stumbles back at the force.

"Goobers!" Joko commands. "Group up! You have to stick together! You have to ***always stick together!"***

Techno stops.

His heart stops racing. His veins stop pumping. His mind stops whirring.

*Always stick together.*

It echoes again, and again, and again. Over and over; the only solemn words in his now empty mind. Like the nerves inside his brain rewire to connect once again, he feels something in his head snap.

A cruel, evil grin stretches out along his face; and his crimson eyes glimmer like a bloodthirsty, ferocious, *monster*.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. He backs up from Joko, his grip still firm on his axe. He uses his other hand to quickly sneak a glance at the phone screen as he pulls it out his pocket. It's not a message.

It's his stats.

And what he reads is almost unbelievable.

*STATS - USER 1 (YOU):*

*INTELLIGENCE: 3/5*

*TEAMWORK: 1/5*

***STRENGTH: 6/5***

For the first time in this game, statistics have changed.

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*Power.*

He shoves the phone back in his pockets.

Joko stops for the first time, and he lowers his sword, seeming to sense something... *Off.*

"What is it?" he asks him, nodding at his phone. His face drips of blood.

Techno stays still for a moment.

*Power.*

And then he begins to laugh. He laughs, and laughs, pointing his axe at Joko.

*POWER.*

He holds power, now. He holds it all. A 6/5 — this is all God's work!

God favours him, of course! He wants him to win! And he wants him to have *all the power this game could possibly have!*

"Hahahahaha!" he laughs, "*HahahAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!*"

He sprints at him, knocking his axe into Joko's left shoulder. He screams, blood streaming out his shoulder, bringing his sword up in defense.

"*You're dead!*" Techno shrieks, drawing back his axe as he swings again. "*I hold more power than what this game has even been designed to hold!*"

He hammers it mercilessly down again at his leg, but Joko's sword blocks it. But even his block is too weak— and Techno's strength overpowers his, sending the brim of his axe gnarling into Joko's legs. More of his blood pools out from the wound.

*"THE POWER WILL BE ALL MINE."*

He cackles again, striking another blow as he chortles like a madman, with a crazed look in his eye; a look far beyond the sanity of a regular human.

Far, far beyond.

It's a side of him both Joko and himself have never seen before.

No. That look in his eyes — it's not the look of a crazed, maniacal psychopath. It's the look of something *completely different.*

It's almost as if.

**... He's no longer human anymore.**

"You're... *You're* insane." Joko utters, stumbling back. The axe slashes at his mask, making it crack. The other leans into his face, blood dribbling down his mouth as he beams.

"I will become God, Joko." Techno hisses threateningly in his ear. "I'm going to kill you and Schlatt, and I'm going to become God. And when I become God, *I will be the one who has all the fucking power in this world. I'm going to conquer Earth — No, the universe. The entire Universe will be under my inevitable wrath, and everyone and everything will submit before me as I become their new God. I'll have complete and total control, and nothing will be in my way to stop me."*

He spits out each word with a venomous brutality stronger than the next.

"Is that what you're fighting for?" is all Joko asks. His voice cracks stronger than his mask.

"What else would I fight for?" he smiles back. Joko doesn't respond.

He lifts up his axe, and strikes down. The blades of the axe and sword clash, before the axe twists around the sword, cutting Joko again. Techno swings it again, and again, and again.

Tearing through his chest.
Ripping through his arms.
Shredding through his ankles.

With each blow, his grip onto sanity only loosens more. Joko doesn't attempt to fight back, anymore.

"Why aren't you trying?" Techno snaps at him. *"Why aren't you trying to kill me?* Don't you want to win? *DON'T YOU WANT TO WIN, JOKO?"*

Another swing.

"I do," he cries back. "I do want to win. *I wan to win so, so badly."*

He growls in response. *"THEN WHY AREN'T YOU TRYING?"*

Joko lowers both his arms, and his voice softens.

"Because there's nothing I can do, Technoblade."
A tear rolls down his eye.
"*I'm at a dead end."*

Everything is still for a moment. Joko's words hang dreadfully in the air, almost as if it had eased Techno of his hunger.

*'Because there's nothing I can do.'*

He lost hope, hasn't he? That's why he's not fighting anymore.

The silence is broken as a goober grabs onto Techno's foot. Triggering his mentality to falter back into it's dehumanized state, he scoffs before slashing his axe at the single goober. He turns back to Joko.

*Until his head starts to pound.*

He raises the axe.

*His head pounds harder. And harder. And harder.*

He swings down the axe.

*His migraine hammers harder than ever before.*

The axe tears through Joko's entire arm. It flies off. Joko falls to the ground, screaming.

Techno's stance wobbles. His vision blurs. He sways.

*Pound, pound.*

He drops the axe.

*The pounding stops.*

He falls to the ground.
And everything.
Goes.
Black.

# 【 GOD ENCOUNTER #5 】

**play music.**

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*GASP.*

*AM I DEAD?*

He shoots up, eyes snapping open; he finds himself awake in the middle of a large hall – very similar to a place he swears he's seen before...

Techno turns stands up slowly and turns around to take a good look at the hall. Is this another God Encounter?

He sees a man his height, standing with his back facing toward him a few meters away; wearing a long black cloak, wings, and horns, he recognises him immediately.

"God?" Techno asks, cautiously walking closer towards the man. A few seconds of silence, pass. Techno breaks it again with another question.

"... Am I dead?"

God doesn't turn around, nor greet him with his usual 'yo!'. Instead, he sighs shakily.

"I thought it would work," he mumbles, "but it didn't. You don't remember, don't you?"

*Thought what would work?*

Techno purses his lips. The air around him turns to frost, sending an uneasy chill up his spine. "Remember... *What?"*

God puts his head in his hands, groaning in frustration as he turns to pace around the hall. He pulls at his black hair.

"I thought if I gave you a sudden thirst for blood, your memories would jog back or something!" he exclaims, pacing around anxiously. "I thought maybe by returning to your *real* self, you'd remember and you could fix everything and I wouldn't have to be like this anymore. But that didn't work, *none of it worked!"*

*What is he talking about? What memories? Fix everything? What does that mean? And what does he mean by real self?*

He feels as if his head is about to explode with a million questions – What does any of this mean? Is he meant to know something? *Anything?*

God then stops walking until he's only a few centimetres away from Techno. He places both his trembling hands on his shoulders,

murmuring distantly with a breaking voice.

"I thought implanting the craving for power into your head would get you to remember!"

*What is he talking about..?!*

Techno pushes God off of him in retaliation.

"God!" he shouts, "what are you talking about? I don't understand! What memories? What power? *What do you mean? I don't know what you mean!!"*

God steps back, still – Techno's yell must have snapped him back into the reality of their situation. The masked figure pauses, and lowers his voice to a more collected tone.

"I'm sorry. If corruption didn't work, then I'm going to have to show you the truth." He swallows. "I don't know if this will work. If this doesn't, then I'll have to *re-do everything* all over again. And I don't know how much longer I can bring myself doing that."

God clicks his fingers. His vision dissolves to white.

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He finds himself standing in the middle of a beach, with a sun setting on it's crystal clear waters horizon. The sand feels soft under his bare feet — it's scary how vivid everything is.

A man runs right past him, wearing nothing but purple-green swimming trunks and a black eyepatch. He recognises him immediately.

Pirate boy. Pokay.

Running just behind is another boy, wearing a blue and black hood with spades on it; his snarling, cocky expression is very familiar. Sneeg.

Techno turns around, seeing where the two boys are running to — they're both grinning madly, waving as they yell inaudible words to their friends. They seem to be ignoring Techno.

Techno follows them, running behind. Over at the otherside is a large volleyball net, packed with a bunch of guys playing happily with a volleyball. Each one of their faces more familiar than the next, until Techno realises.

*It's them.*

Poke, Sneeg — running around, laughing. Ted, Carson, Sparklez, Ant — all on one side of the court, playing as a team. Wilbur, Altrive, Ryan, Joko — on the other side, playing as they yell at each other. Connor, Schlatt, Cooper. And Travis. All hanging out on the side, watching the sunset as they chat amongst themselves.

*It's all of the players.*

Then they all disappear, and everything around him switches to a

different setting, almost like changing scenes in a film.

This time, he finds himself sitting inside a concert-like stadium in the audience seats. In front of him is a wide stage, with a familiar yellow-turtleneck boy standing in the centre with a guitar and mic in hand.

*"Your city gave me asthma,"* Wilbur sings, with a semi-muffled voice in Techno's head. As he sings with melodious chords, he turns around, and sees the rest of the group in their seats, waving at Wilbur Soot with big grins on all their faces.

Techno notices Cooper sitting beside him, smiling as he claps at his friend's performance.

"Cooper?" Techno asks, holding a hand out to the boy. It goes right through him, like a ghost. He pulls back his hand quickly, realising.

*No. These aren't players.* ***They*** *aren't players.*

The scene switches again, a little quicker than the last. He's standing inside of a crowded arcade. There they are, again — all hanging out together as a group.

Cooper, Carson, Ted, and Joko, all laughing at Connor and Wilbur as they dance like old boomers on a dance machine. Ant, Sparklez, Travis and Altrive all competing against each other in a playful competition as they try to score the most points on a first-person zombie-shooter game. Schlatt making a bet against Sneeg that Poke's gonna lose the game of bumper cars with Ryan.

Techno stands there, watching as the boys all laugh in unison.

*They are nothing like the players I've been against.*

*... They are their* ***real selves.***

His vision distorts as the scene switches again, to a blazing campfire set in the middle of the night. Surrounding the bonfire is the group of guys, roasting marshmallows on a stick over the alight fire. Wilbur's singing a camp song, of course.

Carson and Ted are whispering something that sends them both laughing their heads off as they fall off the logs they're sitting on.

Schlatt's chatting with Sparklez and Ant as the three eat s'mores.

Travis shoves a bag of mashmallows into his mouth as Cooper laughs at him.

Altrive throws his marshmallow at Ryan, whose huddling next to Connor as he tries to dodge the throws.

Poke and Sneeg accidentally set their clothes on fire as Joko mocks their stupidity.

But even despite that they're laughing — they're *all laughing.*

And that's the key difference — the line that separates them as

players and them as people:

*They're happy.*

The scene switches again, showing Carson telling dad jokes to Sparklez, Connor, Wilbur and Ted.

*Why is this so familiar?*

It switches again. Ryan, Altrive, Sneeg and Pokay all on a boat, roleplaying as pirates.

*Why do I think I've seen this before?*

And it switches again. This time, it's Ant and Jschlatt talking about their favourite Minecraft music discs, laughing at each other. It's like they're best friends.

The sequences flash again and again, one after the other as the pace quickens.

Having fun at parties.

Hanging out at afternoon lunches and BBQs.

Watching the sunset all together.

Playing video games.

Skateboarding down rails and ramps.

Running around the local city, jumping down stairs and messing around.

It quickens and quickens until all the visions are nothing but a blur surrounding Techno. He steps back, eyes spinning around as he tries to focus on all the visions playing one after the other. What does this mean?

*What does it all mean?*

Until everything around him freezes, and slowly changes to one more scene. This scene moves a lot slower than the rest.

It's a large valley; it's plains and grassy hills stretching out for miles. Flowers blooming the grass, and large trees placed unevenly along the hills.

Together are a trio of three boys, standing beside a tree as they play rock-paper-scissors. It's Joko, Cooper, and Travis.

Joko says something something to Travis, making him laugh. Again, there it is — two people who had supposedly meant to completely hate each other in the game, acting like best friends.

Techno moves toward them, watching closely. Joko ends up losing between both rounds against Cooper and Travis.

"Ha! You lost!" Cooper laughs, pointing mockingly at Joko, who rolls his eyes in response.

"You're IT!" Travis yells, tugging Cooper's sleeve as he breaks off into a run. "10 second headstart!"

The two boys run off into the distance, leaving Joko waiting. Techno decides to follow Cooper and Travis. He runs alongside them.

"You remember the strat, Trav?" Cooper calls out to him, panting as he sprints. Travis nods, throwing a fist into the air.

"Always stick together!"

Techno's eyes grow wide at the phrase, feeling something click inside his heart as he hears the words.

"Yeah!" Cooper grins. "That way, Joko can only tag one of us. So always stick together! **That's how we'll be safe!"**

Then the vision stops, and everything fades black again.

— — — — —

That's also when he notices something — a person missing in all of these visions: *Himself.*

*So why? Why do I remember any of this if I wasn't even there? Why do I remember this if I'm not even there?*

"These aren't just visions, or figments of your imagination, Technoblade." God's voice echoes in the darkness. "These are *memories.* Memories of an alternate life they would have led.. *If none of this ever happened."*

*So these memories...*

*These people.*

*They're real. They're real people. People that have lives — that have futures.*

*... Had futures.*

And the question remains, lingering inside him.

*Did they deserve it? Having their futures robbed from them because of me? Did they deserve meeting such miserable fates?*

Then everything fades once again, revealing one final vision. It's a dark, small and enclosed room. Surrounding the room are hundreds of small TV-like screens, each playing different moments of the boys pasts and memories like little movies.

At the centre of the room is a figure, sitting cross-legged on the floor as they watch the screens simultaneously. The figure has long hair, trailing along the floor as they sit. Is that God?

"God?" Techno whispers, walking towards the figure. The figure turns around slowly. He feels his heart catch to his throat as he sees the face.

It's himself.

"Technoblade." the figure of himself says. And then everything flashes white almost instantly after.

He's hit with a wave of questions, striking him in a way he's never been struck before. And surprisingly, none of them relate to why this is happening.

He comes to a dreadful realisation.

What's the point in holding all the power in the world when you're miserable?

This game — this *war* — fighting each other to the death. All for what? To win and become an immortal being?

No one ever really questioned it. It's an automatic response — almost all the time, when a human is faced between the deciding factor of death and life, they would choose life. Why? Because it's pure survival instinct. Humans have been built to fear death. And when faced against death, their survival instincts will kick in, and they'll do whatever it takes to stay alive.

However some humans might not even fear death — some might fear living, instead. Some might have tried to take their own life, even.

But in the end, no human — fearing life nor death — would ever want to be murdered. Not like this, not like this *game*.

Maybe that's why people are fighting. To survive, not to become God.

In fact, why has *he been fighting?*

This whole time the constant reminder that you must stay alive until the finale to become God had been toying subconsciously inside of Techno's head. Until now.

And he's finding himself questioning something that nobody in this game had ever dared of questioning before:

*Is it worth winning, anymore?*

*Isn't being God so lonely? Living in your own creations? Having all the power in the world takes away a human's motive to survive. When you're guaranteed immortality, what use is there to living? What use is there to being miserable?*

*Wouldn't it be better to die than to live the rest of eternity alone in your own creations?*

*Better to die than to have the weight of the universe on your shoulders?*

*Wouldn't it be better to end it all than to live through it all again?*

*... I'm missing something.*

*I've always been missing something. I've been so lost in my own head that I forgot who I was — who I'm meant to be.*

*I've been so lost I've forgotten my humanity — what really makes me human.*

*...*

*Am I human?*

*What am I, God?*

*What have I lost?*

*I've killed people. I've murdered people. I'm a murderer.*
*... But does that still make me human?*
*Or does that make me something completely different?*

God's voice echoes again in his head, silencing him from his stream of consciousness.

"Do you regret it?"

Truth be told, he doesn't know.

*I don't feel sad. Or guilty. Or remorseful. I can't feel anything; Why can't I feel anything?*

"God?" he cries. "*What am I?"*

God appears, hovering behind him as he places a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "That's a question you should find the answer to yourself. Tell me, Techno. What do you think makes you different from being human?"

Techno looks down.

"Because I'm a murderer." Is all he says. "... And the worst part about that is that I don't feel a single shred of remorse."

He looks at his hands. They're quivering, suddenly covered in flesh and blood.

"Humans are meant to grieve for death." Techno whispers. "*I* want to grieve for death. I want to grieve for the people I've killed. I want to grieve for hurting them. I want to grieve for everybody who has died but I can't. *I can't grieve for them."*

He looks up at God again.

"Even when I had cried that night with Cooper and Schlatt, I didn't mean it. Even then, I felt something missing in me. I cried because I felt obligated to. I cried because I felt like I would be a terrible person if I didn't. I cried because I wanted to feel sad for them. But I don't."

His eyes don't move from God's.

"I don't feel sad. I just want to feel sad, that's all I want. So what am I missing? What is it that makes me unable to grieve for everybody who has died by my hands? *What is it have I lost?"*

An unwelcoming silence hangs in the hall's air. God's whisper shatters it like glass.

"What have you lost?" he repeats. He floats down to the ground, his feet touching the white floor. "You haven't lost anything, Technoblade. You are the way you are now because of *me."*

He's standing in front of him, now. "In fact, *the real person who has lost something... Is me."*

And he places a hand on Techno's chest, illuminating his entire

body as his whispers sink through the air.

*"You want to mourn for the dead? Then mourn for the dead, Blade. Mourn for the dead and you'll be alive again."*

Darkness falls one more time.

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He opens his eyes, and for the first time he feels like a different person. Tears are streaming down his face like cascading torrents of rivers.

"I'm alive," he croaks. *"I'm alive!"*

He runs his fingers over his cheeks. Damp and wet.

He looks around, and it's just about dawn. He sees someone sitting beside him, with his head hanging low.

Schlatt.

"Schlatt?" he croaks again, catching the boy's attention. He smiles, relieved. "Schlatt!"

Before Schlatt has the chance to respond, he crawls to him, pulling him into a warm embrace as he cries in his shoulders. Mixtures of emotions welled up inside him flood out, pouring his heart out from his eyes as he sobs. Schlatt, silenced, hugs him back. A few minutes pass, Techno sobbing out of both joy and grief in his arms, basking in his companionship.

"I saw him," Techno talks quickly through choked sobs. "I saw God and he showed me — all of us, Schlatt. You, Connor, Cooper, Travis, Joko — all of you guys were friends. You were all friends in another life, and you all knew each other."

He hugs tighter. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything. But I found it, Schlatt. I found what I've been missing. I found my humanity. I can grieve, *I can cry. I can mourn for the people I've killed.* And you want to know something, Schlatt? I don't care anymore. I'm not afraid of death anymore."

He laughs, pools of tears flowing down his face. His his smiles ceases as he feels Schlatt's body go cold and rigid in his arms.

"Schlatt..?" he whispers. "Why aren't you... Saying anything?"

He doesn't respond. Techno pulls back, and looks around.

"Wh... Where's Joko?" Techno asks him.

Silence.

"Techno." Schlatt says.

"Yeah?"

...

"We're in the final 2."

His heart stops.

"*What?"*

"Joko's dead."

No. No, he can't be dead.

"I... I killed him...?" Techno cries. Schlatt shakes his head, and looks at Techno with bloodshot eyes. He's crying, too.

"No." he mumbles. *"He killed himself."*

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

# ➳ CHAPTER 46: victim to his darkness

**[ I know I always do this but aaa please play the music whole way !! ]**

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

**NUMBER 13 — JOKO**

***XX HOURS BEFORE***

One by one, the goobers all begin to disappear, signifying that their disappearance is due to Joko's nearing death. His sword God had given him disappears, too. Of course. They were created for him to dodge his death after all, right? But now that he's failed to dodge his death, his punishment is this.

Laying sprawled and helpless on the concrete rooftop, he cranes his head around to look at his now-torn off arm. Blood is pouring like an endless cascading waterfall from his open wound.

*Without blood supply, I'll inevitably die. When an arm is amputated without blood supply, the victim can last between 1 - 6 hours. I learned that from being in the police force.*

He closes his eyes as he reminisces over his past days of working at a policeman. He hadn't been working in the force for too long.

In fact, he joined the day after he found out Amanda's mother had passed away.

Seeing her miserable — seeing her feel so lost and alone — he couldn't *bare* it. So he joined the police force realising that if he didn't know how to protect her that time, he'll learn now. And if anything else were to happen to her, he'd know how to protect her.

And not just her, either — but anyone whose ever felt that. Anyone who's felt like they were weak. Lonely. Afraid. Being part of the police force was a reminder that he *does* have the power to change people's lives for the better.

But now he's the one who feels that — now *he's the victim.* Weakness, loneliness, fear. It's building up inside him and he can feel himself breaking.

Footsteps silence his thoughts. He opens his eyes drowsily, and sees a man walk towards him, past Techno's collapsed body.

"Well how the tables have turned."

Schlatt.

"Good job, Schlatt." Joko murmurs weakly, attempting to crack a smug smirk. "You managed to fool me into keeping you alive. I give

you props to that."

Schlatt stops walking, until he's only a few metres away from Joko. His entire face is bleeding, coated and painted with wounds and slashes. And not to mention his entire arm is *gone*— he's never seen him look so weak before. Both mentally *and* physically.

Schlatt turns around slowly, glancing at Techno's fallen body in horror. Joko picks up on this.

"Don't worry, he's not dead." Joko says. "At least, don't think so. Received no critical injuries, just blacked out."

Schlatt relaxes a little, but his confusion's still there.

"Why aren't you going to kill him?" Schlatt asks, turning back to Joko. "There's still time."

"Because I'll die anyway. None of it will matter," Joko frowns, voice lowering. "It won't be long before I bleed out to death. I'm just stalling for the inevitable."

"Dead end?" Schlatt asks.

"Yeah."

He smiles, not smugly this time. This time, it's a smile of sadness. A few seconds of silence pass, of neither one of them moving nor speaking. All the while Joko's head spinning:

*Why isn't he killing me? He could kill me right now. Why isn't he doing it? He could kill me and Techno right now and win. Does he not want that?*

"Why aren't you killing me?" Joko croaks out to him. Schlatt bites his lip.

"I don't have anything to kill you with."

*Pathetic excuse.*

Schlatt's phone buzzes in his pocket. He awkwardly pulls it out, checking the screen. He's stalling, isn't he? It's infuriating him. Just get it over with.

Schlatt's eyes grow wider.

*WHAT'S POPPIN' SCHLATT?*

"What does it say?" Joko mutters.

"It says," Schlatt reads, " What's poppin Sch—"

Everything booms a flash of blinding white.

*Did God just trick him into saying his catchphrase?*

Soon enough, both their visions return normal, even despite Joko's critical injury which should have disadvantaged him.

A glowing gun appears in Schlatt's empty hand. On his diary, it says:

*WOAH! CONGRATS, YOU SAID YOUR CATCHPHRASE. YOUR*

*SPECIAL ABILITY IS:*

***THE 50-50 GUN. ONE BULLET. ONE CHAMBER.***

*If you shoot someone else, their death will be far beyond painful.*

*You shoot your enemy, and they'll get their karma for being a human-murdering machine. It will be agonising — it's wraths more painful than living in Hell itself; like something ripping out the breathing life force from you, haunting and choking you with the dark clutches of your own demons and spirits. It's anything but the feeling of relief — it's the feeling of regret, pain, guilt. The demons inside you will be eating you alive like maggots. Spitting in your face, telling you that you are worthless and you will die forever alone. It's worse than torture — it's death. Real death. Mayhaps your enemy might not even deserve such a traumatising death.*

*OR use the gun on yourself, when your death will be flooded with emotions of relief and peace.*

*All your regrets and guilt will dissipate; dying feeling like the weight of the world that was once on your shoulders is gone. Tranquil, melodic, and some might even say it's rather joyful. You'll finally feel like you were worth something, and nothing will worry you. You'll die in peace — in safety — in harmony. Like having a blissful dream before falling unconsciously into an eternal sleep.*

*SO WHICH OPTION WILL IT BE? YOU'LL HAVE UNTIL THE GAME ENDS TO DECIDE.*

So it's not any ordinary hand gun. It's a gun that can almost decide the future, in a way. He looks at it, examining it carefully.

*Well... Joko's dead, isn't he? He'll bleed out eventually. If I shoot him now, I won't be ending his suffering. I'll make it worse. Not even Joko deserves that.*

*... So I have to let him die out. And once he does, I can use this gun on Technoblade. And then I'll win the game.*

He breathes out shakily.

Joko stares at the weapon in his hand. Something trickles down his forehead — he doesn't know if it's sweat or blood.

"What are you waiting for?" he mutters at him, nodding at the gun. "Shoot me."

Schlatt stutters, shocked by the sudden demand. It's not like him to be like this, and he can't tell if it's another cocky challenge or if he's serious. "Wh.. *What?"*

"Kill me, top 2." Joko continues, his voice cracking ever so slightly. "Then kill him, and you win. You can win right now if you just kill us both."

Schlatt, still looking down at his gun, mumbles in response. "But you'll suffer—"

He stops himself as he hears Joko sobbing quietly to himself. With his only hand, he covers his mouth, muffling his cries.

"Joko...?" Schlatt murmurs. He doesn't answer for a few long seconds, until:

"*I just wanted to see her again."*

See her again?

He sucks in a deep breath, fighting for air.

"Amanda told me," he begins, "she told me that she'll be waiting for me by the park where we first met, every day. Every day, she said she'll be there, waiting for me to come back. She's waiting there now. I know because God told me."

He looks up at him, with miserable, dull blue eyes. "She *never* gave up on me, Schlatt. Even after months of not seeing her, she *still* hasn't given up. She believes with her whole heart that *I will come back."*

He pauses, trying to bite back his tears. But he can't, and they start pouring down even quicker.

"*But I won't,"* he cries softly. "*Because I gave up on her."*

Schlatt doesn't know what to say, and continues to remain silent as Joko's desperate sobs wreak excruciatingly in the air.

"And when I got that dead end this morning, I knew I had to go there. I had to make it there to see her before I die. I just wanted to see her again, and *tell her everything will be OK*. That *she'll be OK*. But now I can't. Because I'm dying, I'm *slowly dying."*

He cries more, biting down his tongue as he covers his eyes with his hand. His face is wet with blood and his salt tears; and for the first time, Schlatt can see it.

His weakness. But more importantly — his *humanity*.

He's scared — not of death, but of love. He's afraid of leaving her all alone. That's why he fought — because he loved. An omen to keep her safe. A reminder that there's always a reason to fight. A promise that he'll return to the love of his life.

And he's let her down.

"That's why you gave up," Schlatt mumbles. "Because you feel like she doesn't deserve a failure."

Joko stops crying; shoulders halting to a pause, he removes his hand from his face. And he looks up at him, with pleading eyes, as his voice softens to barely a whisper.

"*Kill me, Schlatt. Please."*

Schlatt returns the glare, unable to form words from the shock of his pleas.

"*Please."* he whispers again, his pleads desparate as he begs for death upon him. Schlat looks at his gun.

He can't kill him. If he does, he'll put him through Hell.

"I..." Schlatt stammers. "I... can't."

"Yes! *Yes you can!!"* he suddenly yells, relentless frustration tearing through his desperate sadness as the words rip out from his throat. His voice interweaved with his sobs, saliva sprays from his mouth as he cries out with desperation ever so raw. *"YES YOU CAN KILL ME! Put your fucking gun to my forehead and shoot you dumb bastard!!* Pull the *fucking trigger and shoot me like a man!"*

He finds himself moving his finger to the trigger, aiming the gun at him with shaking arms. But he can't. He can't let himself pull.

"*I can't stand this!!"* Joko shrieks out again, begging with sheer urgency as he writhes on the floor. "*I can't stand to suffer like this anymore!* I failed her— *I failed her!! I DON'T DESERVE TO LIVE ANYMORE! JUST SHOOT ME AND LET ME END IT ALL. It'll be my karma for my weakness. Please, please kill me! Please put me out my misery!"*

His arms are shaking wildly. A single, solemn tear of his town runs down his cheek.

*Shoot.*

*Shoot.*

*Shoot!*

"I *can't, Joko."* Schlatt cries. "I *can't do it."*

His cries cease as Joko's eyes flutter closed, and he takes a deep breath to calm himself. A thin stream of blood trickles down from his mouth, and he lowers his voice to a soft, shaking whisper.

*"I gave up on her when she needed me the most.* I left her alone when I swore to her that I'll never leave. I promised her I'd come back. She needed me. *And I'm such a horrible person for not even doing that."*

Melancholy surrounds the air around them, with Joko's muffled weeps intertwining with the atmosphere. Schlatt falls silent. And he drops the gun. Joko watches his refusal, defeated.

A minute passes, and Joko mumbles again, his voice steady. "Schlatt. Give me my phone."

Confusion strikes his face, but he obliges, and gently kicks his phone into Joko's hand.

"I want you to win, Schlatt," he confesses, tears rolling one by one down his face. "If not for yourself, then for me. Kill that son of a bitch and become God.

And if you somehow become God, then please. Please tell Amanda I'm sorry. Please tell her that I'm so*, so sorry. That I'm sorry for failing her, for letting her down.* I'm sorry for not being strong enough till the end. *I'm sorry I was weak. And I'm sorry that I gave up —"*

His sobs cut himself off, and he cries more. Torn at seeing him

like this, Schlatt bends down to his knees, and puts his hand in his. As he holds his hand, he comforts him.

"I will. I'll tell her that."

Joko breathes in. "And... I have one more request. If you become God... *Then promise me to protect her for me.* And to *never* let her feel alone again."

Schlatt nods, feeling his own eyes leak of tears. "I promise."

*I guess in the end, things didn't work out the way I thought it would.*

*I needed to become God — I needed to win — for her. I didn't want to make it out of here alive. I wanted to make it out of here with the power to keep her safe.*

*She didn't deserve to be alone... Nobody deserves to be alone.*

*If I could have just become God, I could have fixed that.*

*I could have kept her safe forever. I could have fulfilled my promise and never let her feel like she's all alone ever again. I could have just made my promise. We could have lived together. We could have been happy.*

He cranes his head around, and looks down. Beside his leg, is a small box that had fallen out his pocket as he fought.

*... I could have proposed to her.*

*And now I can't do that. I can't tell her how much I loved her or how much I tried to fight for her. I can't tell her any of that. I'm going to die as someone who failed her.*

*...*

*But if Schlatt could just tell her.*

*Just let her know that I'm sorry, and that even with me gone she's strong enough to make it through this and she won't feel alone.*

*Then maybe death won't be so bad.*

He moves his hand from from Schlatt's, and inches it toward his phone.

"Thank you, Schlatt." he whispers, face wet of pouring tears. He clenches his phone. "*Forgive me, Amanda."*

He hammers it to the concrete floor, and the phone snaps in half.

He was overwhelmed.

The stress of him needing to win and being in the top 3 had just placed too much pressure over his shoulders.

He was a rational man, Joko. But combining his rationality with stress of surviving for the people he had loved, willpower to fight, and pressure of being in the final remaining three — it was too much even for even a man with a strong mentality.

He may have been strong at the beginning — he may have dictated most of his attacks, manipulated people to trust him in order for him to use them to his advantage — he may have commanded an entire alliance for the sole purpose of trying to eliminate one opponent, and he may have even backstabbed his own teammates. He may have been merciless, fearless and even cruel.

But in the end, he was only human. A human can only take so much.

And things like that — it builds up. He may have not been aware of it, but it all built up inside his head. The visions of the goobers weren't just figments of traumatic imagination from Travis' death.

They were figments of imagination from everything he had been through. From the minute he had killed a man.

Hallucinations are a common symptom of trauma, after all.

There's only so much a human can handle. It might not have had an effect on him in the moment, but over time it has.

And that's what had led him to his death.

In the end, the pressure had broken him.

It had broken him in more ways than just death, or love. It had broken his mind. His body. His heart.

Joko was a strong man indeed.

But sometimes, even the strongest of men can fall victim to their own darkness.

✧×□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□×✧

***ONLY TWO MORE PLAYERS REMAIN...***

# ➳ CHAPTER 47: KILL ME. [ FINAL TWO ]

**[ music is optional but recommended! also, PREP yourselves... ]**

✧×□□□□°*❋ ❋ ❋*°□□□□×✧

**TECHNOBLADE**

"So... that's what happened?"

Techno, mouth open wide, stares at Schlatt with his burning, bloodshot eyes. His voice shakes as he speaks.

"Yeah." Schlatt says, finishing his story. "And now here we are... In the final - fucking - remaining 2." He gulps at the last word, almost unable to believe himself.

Techno looks away, observing his surroundings — he finds himself sitting in front of a concrete pillar, noticing that they're both sitting downstairs in the same abandoned warehouse.
Just behind Schlatt, whose sitting in front of him, is a large broken window, revealing the view of the dawning sunrise.

He sucks a deep breath in, inhaling the morning air. "How long was I out for?"

"Almost 3 days, pretty sure."

*"Heh?!"* he exclaims, baffled. "*3 days?!* What a scam! And you didn't kill me either? Why? You had the perfect chance to win!"

"I wanted to wait until you woke up!" Schlatt exclaims back frustratingly.

Techno zips his lips, pausing as the air grows heavy and silent. He stops, and for a moment his mind is completely empty, as he stares into Schlatt's chafed eyes.

"Schlatt," he mumbles, after a minute of silence. *"I... Killed them."*

Schlatt raises an eyebrow, scooting closer. "What?"

"I killed them." Techno repeats, glancing down at his hands. "I killed Poke, I killed Taylor. I killed Altrive, and I killed his friend, Ryan. And I was the reason Carson and... *Joko.*. died. And *Travis.* He died to *save* me, but what the *fuck was it even for?"*

His voice starts to break on edge as he cries, putting his head into his trembling hands; memories of murdering each of those boys play in his head: *"I killed all these people.* These people, who had lives — *I killed them all.* And I know it was all part of my master plan but I can't help feeling... *Miserable."*

Schlatt places a hand on Techno's shoulder to ease him of his soft

cries. "Well, yeah.." he comments. "That's kinda the point of this fuckin' game, huh?"

"I didn't *have* to kill them!" Techno exclaims again. "*But I did. I did, and I never felt a shred of remorse. Not until now.* And brutal, man-murdering, blood-thirsting *monster* like me... *Doesn't deserve to be God.*"

He sucks in a deep, shaky breath of air, looking up from his hands straight into Schlatt's hazel, glassy eyes. Does he really want to do this? Yes. Yes, he does.

"Schlatt. Today's your lucky day." he whispers, wrapping both his hands around Schlatt's new gun he has in his hand. "I'm letting you do it."

He jerks the front of the gun to his forehead, snatching it out of Schlatt's hands as he spits; "*I'm letting you become God."*

"What..?" Schlatt murmurs, struck by the words coming out from his friends mouth.

"*Kill me."* Techno smiles. "If you've ever been my friend, then do it. Kill me."

He shakes his head slowly, grabbing the gun back. "No. NO. I'm NOT doing this shit again! Listen here Blade, I'm not going to fucking kill you because... Because *I don't deserve to win!* I don't deserve to be God *more* than you!!"

"No!" Techno argues back, holding his hands up at him. "*I* don't deserve to be God — I've- I've killed *so, so many people!"*

*"But at least you had the courage to."* he cries, his own words trembling in the air. "*You had the courage to fight!* What have I ever done? I just hid behind your back and dictated your moves. *I've done nothing."*

Techno lowers his arms and voice, silenced by his words; mainly because it's true. He can't argue against that.

The tips of the rising sun begin to glow from behind the trees in the distance, it's pinky-orange shining through the crevices in between the leaves. The light hits the side of the boys faces as they stare at each other in misery.

Schlatt bites his lip, and lowers his voice, too. "You know, I came into this game with a motive, Technoblade. A motive just like everybody else. I wanted to become God so I could *fix all the mistakes I've made.*

From the minute I existed, I always fucked up *everything.* I've scammed people and robbed them of what was theirs. I've broken

so many *people,* without even a care in the world! I've stolen and I've lied, I've cheated and manipulated — both in this game, and in my past."

He breathes out, closing his eyes as he clenches his fist tightly. "And if I could've just became God, I could've fixed what I broke. Return what I've stolen. Repay my debt to the people I've lied to. If I could've just became God, I would have made myself the man I could have *never been."* Each word spills relentlessly out his mouth, laced and twined with the pain and guilt of his aching heart. Tears roll down the side of his face as he speaks. "*That's why I fought.* I fought because I thought that if I won, **I could finally be forgiven.**"

As Techno hears this, he sees a side of Schlatt he doesn't think he's ever seen before — a side of truth.

*He fought for forgiveness.*

That's why he kept going on. But in that case... What is he trying to get at? What's making him want to give it all up? Lack of self-belief?

"... But for those 3 days you were out cold, I realised."

*Oh no. The 'but'.*

Schlatt hesitates. "I could've *won.* Right there, right then, I could've shot you and won and I could finally be forgiven. But... *But I couldn't do it.*

... Because I realised no matter *what* I try to do, I could never, ever change. I will always be a scammer. I will always be a cheat. and I will always, always, be a liar. *Always.* And being God *won't make me a better person."*

Is that true?

It any of it really true?

Techno doesn't answer. He doesn't know how to. And neither does Schlatt — in fact, he stops talking for a bit, contemplating silently to himself before finally opening his mouth to speak again.

"That night when we first met." he starts, swallowing hard as a bead of sweat drips down his forehead. "*I injected anaesthesia in you and tried to kill you in your sleep."*

*... What?*

He suddenly remembers — the night they first met, he remembers falling asleep all of a sudden. The memory is still hazy in his mind, but it's still there, and he can remember it. Did Schlatt really..?

"I TRIED TO KILL YOU, TECHNO!" he repeats again. "I put the fuckin' muzzle to your forehead and was *only a finger off sending a*

*bullet straight through your head!* Remember when you passed out that night? That was because of me. I knew *all along* you were the bounty and *I* wanted to be the one to *escape*. The only reason you're still here is because I never grew the balls to kill you.

And ever since then, all I've ever done was use you as a human shield and lie. Not just to my enemies, like Joko. But to my *friends."*

He puts his head in his hands, sniffing as he cries out. ".. Remember when you and Carson had met me, Joko, Connor, Travis and Wilbur under the bridge that night? You want to know why we were there in the first place?"

He looks up again, grabbing the stunned Techno by the shoulders.

"Because *of me. I told Joko about your plans to get Travis back, and I told him everything else, too.* I used my diary to find out where your location would be in the next 24 hours and we *used that to our advantage. I turned my back against you!"*

But... He ended up saving him, in the end. He regretted doing that... *Right?*

"And-And *I* was the reason Connor died, too," Schlatt cries on. "I argued with him one night and because of my selfishness he separated from me and slept somewhere else! If I didn't just fucking argue with him like a child, he'd have lived longer!"

*No, it's not your fault. Don't blame yourself for his death.*

"And it doesn't end there, no!"

His voice grows louder as it fractures underneath his burden of tears and guilt. Shaking his head, he exclaims more with trembling hands. "Y-You want to know how Cooper died? *Because of me."*

*... No.*

*"*I killed Cooper, Technoblade."

*No he didn't.*

"He didn't drown, and he didn't try to kill me either. *I killed him.* I was terrified of him and I pushed him into the water and strangled him to *fucking death!!"*

"No!" Techno argues back, impulsively. "You didn't kill him! Because... My diary. It- It just said he drowned!"

*That's it — the diary had only stated that USER 11 had drowned. So there's no way Schlatt would hav—*

"I *know* it said he drowned!" Schlatt snaps at him. "You think I didn't fucking know that?! I don't know why God didn't make the diary tell you the truth, but he clearly didn't, so I will instead. *I. Killed. Cooper."*

A piece of his heart tears in half as he hears those words; words spat at him with such genuine, it hurts him. It hurts him knowing that he means it from the very depth of his soul. And for the first

time ever, he *wishes* he was lying.

*"*That day we met Ant and had a fight," Schlatt murmurs to him, glancing back and forth, his voice seething with mixed emotions. "When you told me that you should have never trusted a scammer, and you left... You were right, Techno. You should have *never trusted me!* God, ***I** can't even trust me!"*

What he's saying finally clicks inside his head, and Techno raises his hand out. He eyes the gun Schlatt has beside him, before darting his eyes back to meet his.

"Schlatt... Don't do this to m..."

"I just wanted to make things better again!" Tears stream down his face as he cries out, his voice like a knife to Techno's heart. "*I just wanted forgiveness! All I wanted was to just be a better person. I wanted to change for the better!!"*

No. That's wrong. *You have changed for the better. You admitted to your mistakes. You've admitted to everything.*

That's what he wants to say; he opens his mouth, but finds that he can't say anything. *Why can't he talk!?*

He tries to speak, but his voice distorts into choked-back sobs.

*"Y-You're w-wrong."* He manages to stutter out. Schlatt scoffs, and he looks down.

"You don't understand, Technoblade. I can't take it back — I can't fucking take back *any* of what I did. And my worst regret was that night when I first tried to kill you."

He takes a deep breath, and clenches his fists to try stop the shaking.

"Listen," he starts. "I'm... I'm not saying I regret not shooting you... I'm saying that I *regret not shooting myself instead."*

The air hanging in the air freezes.

His crimson eyes widen, and Schlatt glances up, making eye-contact once again. Graveness from his abraded, chocolate eyes tear into his; his blood runs cold inside his veins, and his entire body grows numb; the only thing he can feel is the flow of tears pouring out from his eyes as he watches his broken friend.

Schlatt swallows, his own voice quivering ever so slightly as his fingers coil around his gun. He stands up, stepping back from Techno as he looks down at him. "*So that's what I'm going to do."*

"No!" he yells immediately after, frantically stumbling up to his two feet as he roars out. *"NO!! SCHLATT! NO DON'T DO IT!!"*

He stumbles forward, reaching out to stop Schlatt. Vision hazy and blurred by his own tears, he trips over his own foot, falling

onto the concrete floor in front of the man. This time, he doesn't get up; instead he crawls onto his knees, and cries, clutching onto Schlatt's leg.

*"Please don't leave me."*

Schlatt looks down at him, torn. He tries to crack a smile. "I guess they didn't call you the 'Blood God' for no reason, huh?"

*"No..."*

"God, stop crying." He's not sure whether he's laughing or crying. Schlatt puts the muzzle of his gun to his own head, smiling miserably as he shuts his eyes tight. "I'm just repaying my debt, that's all. My debt that was long, *long overdue."*

There's a bang, followed by Jschlatt falling lifeless into Techno's arms.

✧ ✖ ✧

**JSCHLATT**

*His worries; his guilts; his regrets; they all take the form of butterflies, and he watches as they flutter off harmoniously into the horizon of the never-ending valleys.*

*He finds himself awake, standing in a field of grass. Is he dead? He must be, right?*

*He used the gun on himself, after all.*

*He could have used it on Techno. But why would he? He'd only put him through more Hell.*

*And then, like the weight of the world finally lifts off his shoulders, he feels himself fall back, landing cushioned by the soft ground. With glass eyes, he watches as he raises his hand up above him, opening his palm — lining the tips of his fingers with the clouds above.*

*But even in spite of his tiredness, he feels more awake than ever. In spite of falling into the hands of death, he feels alive. More alive than he's ever been.*

*And so he realises.*

*He realises that this game* ***had*** *changed him.*

*It might have not made him become a man of power. Or a man of bravery.*

*...*

*But as a man of heart.*

*He had always believed that not being capable of getting blood on your hands made you weak. Not being able to kill — to* ***murder —*** *made you incapable of ever holding courage.*

*But that's not true.*

*Bravery and courage are two very similar, yet have incredibly differing meanings. Bravery, a physical confidence in strength — the ability to confront something painful without fear. It's a natural, effortless quality.*

*While courage. Courage — the mental confidence in strength — the ability to confront something painful* ***despite*** *fear. It's no natural born quality — it's a value, a choice, a state of mind.*

*And unlike bravery, courage is driven by a cause; and it drives him to believe that cause is worth standing up and fighting for.*

*And being a man of heart, is a man of courage. Seeing and reacting to so much death, yet pushing on. Pushing on until he's the last one of the last left — that's courage. That's all it takes to have courage.*

*A unique form of courage, unlike the rest. A form of courage that builds you stronger. Stronger than a machine thirsting for blood — but rather, a man of willpower. Willpower and heart.*

*If he never believed in himself, then why did he make it to the finals? No. None of this was a coincidence. None of it was luck, not at all.*

*Because even when he didn't realise it — even if he was never aware of it — his willpower to fight was still aflame within him. Whether it's a blazing fire or a small ember — all it takes is a spark to make you fight. And until that spark burns out, your conscience will* ***never*** *stop fighting.*

*And his spark all along wasn't forgiveness, nor the wish for strength or bravery. But it was belief. His real reason to fight was to gain belief in himself.*

*To believe.*

*Even now, that flame hasn't burnt out. It's alight — and it's sparking, more than ever. It's blazing, it's cackling, it's igniting.*

*And as his eyes drowse close for the final time, he reaches out with his arm as far as he can, touching the skies.*

*He breathes out, sparks spraying from his mouth as they turn into doves. He doesn't feel weak, anymore. Torrents of tranquility and courage wash over him, and he feels at ease as his consciousness begins to slip. And as his consciousness slips, he believes.*

*He believes.*

*He believes.*

*He believes.*

*And now.*

*For the first time.*

*He's finally found peace.*

✧ ⊰ ⊱ ✧

**TECHNOBLADE, FINAL SURVIVOR**

His mind whirrs nonstop as kneels there, holding the body of his fallen friend in his arms. He's unnervingly cold. His phone buzzes.

**USER 15 HAS COMMIT SUICIDE.**

**USER 15 HAS REACHED A DEAD END.**

*This can't be happening. This can't be happening right now.*

He the last one left, isn't he? Everybody else is dead.

Everybody else is dead.

Dead.

"N-No..." he chokes, his heart ripping inside his chest, bursting with aching pain. While the glow of the sunrise still hits his face, he doesn't feel the same warmth he had felt before. Everything is cold.

Suddenly the walls of the abandoned warehouse radiate white, before crumbling and dissipating into thin air.

Everything before him starts to glow white, and he feels Schlatt slip out from his bloodied arms.

*No...*

And then, he hears the voice of God, calling out from among the skies above.

"THE GAME IS OVER."

The skies begin to separate, and the floors begin to crack.

*No. No, I don't want it. I don't want to be God.*

White starts to glow from inside the crevices of the ground, as God's voice booms

"THE WINNER..."

*Don't say it.*

"OF MIRAI SMP."

*I don't want to be God. I don't want to be God.*

"IS..."

*NO. NO. NO N O . OHON. NO NO.*

His eyes dart to the gun on the floor, and he grabs it.

*"USER 1: TECHNOBLADE!"*

But he doesn't hear anything else after he rams the gun into his head and pulls the trigger.

# □ AFTER, PT 1 □

***[ play music all through for better effect ]***

*Am I dead? For real this time?*

"No."

His eyes snap open. He's lying in the middle of a large podium with a golden-silver crown symbol. In front of him is God.

"The gun had only one bullet, idot." God frowns from behind his mask. "I can't believe you were about to kill yourself, though."

Techno brushes his hair out his face, feeling disconnected and aloof from reality. Well, assuming this is reality. Is it another one of those 'encounters'?

What just happened? Why did everything go white?

He tugs onto God's sleeve, stumbling up. "G-God? What happened?"

God doesn't say anything; instead, a prideful, gleaming grin curves along his face — a smile big enough to be seen through the mask.

"You've won."

He feels his own heart stop beating.

God smiles at his shock, elaborating. "You won Mirai SMP. You did it, Technoblade. You managed to out-last 14 other people. And now you're going to become God!"

His words are intertwined with a sense of relief and excitement — like as if he'd been waiting a billion years for this moment.

He shakes his head, slowly stepping back as his thoughts and memories recollect.

That's right. He won.

"*No."* Techno murmurs. "No... No, this can't be happening."

He remembers it all.

He remembers killing them.

*Killing them.*

*Who in their right mind would murder another human being without a shred of sympathy? Me. I did. And I can't stand knowing that I did. What happened to me? What have I become? I've killed people.*

*But at what cost? What was the cost in going through all of that? To break my humanity; to tear down my morality; all for what? Eternal misery?*

Thin linings of tears start to leak out from his eyes and down his cheeks, and a sudden burst of fury and terror surges through him; he grabs God by the shoulders, leaning close, shrieking with urgency as saliva sprays onto God's mask:

*"DON'T LET ME BE GOD. I DON'T WANT TO BE GOD, I DON'T WANT TO BE GOD ANYMORE PLEASE DON'T LET ME—!!"*

God pushes him off forcefully, taken slightly aback at his outburst. "Techno, calm yourself. Isn't this what you wanted?"

*Isn't this what I wanted...?*

*What kind of question is that?*

"Could I have brung them back?" Techno spits. "*Could I? Can I?"*

God bites his lip. Techno knows the answer already.

"*Then I don't want it."*

If he can't bring them back — if he can't bring his *friends* back — then he doesn't want it.

He clenches his fist, seething from gritted teeth as he argues against God. "If I can't bring them back, then I don't want it. I don't want to be God. There's no point *to being God!!"*

And as he shouts, he cries. He sobs for the fallen as he cries out for mercy — all the while God remains silent against his pleas. He's scared. He's scared of what's to come.

*"Y-Y-You don't understand, God!!"* his voice wavers violently, breaking. "I— I can't be God. I can't be. I'd rather die. *I'd rather die than become God."*

And he stops, overwhelmed by more wretched sobs. God places a firm hand on Techno's shoulder, easing him from his trembling body.

"No, you don't understand..." God murmurs, causing Techno to shoot up out of his grasp in absolute rage.

"*I don't understand??* No, *YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!* YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING, GOD. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, YOU DON'T. *I'D RATHER DIE—"*

And suddenly, God roars out; his voice booms across the never-ending halls of the stadium, vibrating the place as if there were an earthquake.

"*YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY, THEN, TECHNOBLADE? WHY YOU MUST BE GOD? YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY* ***YOU*** *DON'T UNDERSTAND? THEN I'LL TELL YOU WHY."*

He throws him to the floor, marching up to him. God's crimson eyes flicker with a burning rage, yet what comes out of his mouth is no more than an empty, hollow ring — a soft-spoken whisper as he murmurs with a vacant voice.

"Because this whole time, the **Real** God was never me. *It was you."*

"What?" He blinks, and steps back. What... What is he talking about?

God, aware of his sudden confusion, exhales deeply, before sitting down on a chair he had just summoned. His shoulders slump, and Techno gets the feeling that what he's about to say next is going to be a lot.

"There's a lot I haven't told you, Techno." God breathes out. "A *whole* lot. So I'll tell you it. I'll tell you everything. And I'll start from the very, very beginning."

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"I never used to be God of this Universe — like you, I used to be human. And as a human, I went by a name. My name was Zak.

Millions and millions of years ago, I used to be a human. An ordinary human whose life spiralled into complete and utter chaos. And just like every other human, I had a dream — a goal I wanted to achieve and live up to in my life. That goal being a Content Creator.

As a kid, I filmed videos for Youtube every day, and I'd spend all night editing and working on them just for fun. I even isolated myself from all my friends at school just to make videos.

And as time went on, I ended up dedicating my entire life to Youtube. I did spend a bit of my life learning code, but I abandoned it for my youtube carer. I managed to gain popularity, and I met a few friends along the way, too.

Those friends being the people I held closest to — Vincent, and Darryl. We all had one thing in common — we were youtubers. So we came up with stage-names that we went by. Vincent was a6d. Darryl was BadBoyHalo, or 'Bad' for short. And me — I was Skeppy.

Back then, things in life were going awesome. I had a stable career, a job, friends, and money. Everything was perfect.

And it stayed that way for 3 or so years, until the day I turned 20, the 17th of January. A6d and Bad being my closest friends at the time, we had never actually met up in real life. For years, we've been planning a day we should all meet up — and we did. We planned to to meet up together in L.A on my birthday, and live together in a rented house to continue our careers.

Months prior we booked a ticket to L.A, and on the 17th of January, I flew there to meet up with Bad and a6d. It was expensive as hell, and it was the first time I had ever left behind my family.

I had to sacrifice *everything* I had for this — my comfortable life, my

family, my friends back in Florida — I had to give up *everything* for our sole plan.

Once I arrived in L.A, I had just received news that a6d's VISA got denied at the last minute. God, it really sucked hearing that because that'd mean our rents would have to be split between just me and Bad, and paying for the apartment was already expensive enough. It was tough, trying to find a way for him to get in.

He stopped being in contact with me a few days after telling me he was denied, and I started to worry what happened to him. I was waiting there alone, in our house in L.A, praying to God that he would make it. Bad was running a little late, too, but I didn't lose all hope yet though.

If a6d can't make it, I still had him.

Well. . . I *thought* I had Bad. A week went by and I only just found out then that Bad had mysteriously disappeared. His face was all over the news — news claimed he was dead. But his body couldn't be found anywhere.

At this point, I was panicking. Not only I was panicking for the disappearance of both my closest friends, but I was also forced to live in this apartment *way* too expensive for just me to handle alone, *all the way on the other side of the country.* It was hard, *really hard.* The pressure of having to work multiple different jobs just to afford enough rent to pay the bills was building up inside me.

Not only that, but I had to try crack in as much videos as I could too. I went countless nights without sleep; spending my days working shifts and my nights making and editing videos every day.

I never felt so alone in my life.

My family lived all the way on the other side of the world from me, so they couldn't do anything. Bad and A6D were both completely gone. And I had just *barely* enough money.

I couldn't afford to keep up with taxes and rent pay, and I knew that real soon I was gonna run out of time before I'd be completely broke. God, it was stressful. Too stressful. Too much for me to handle and I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take feeling like this anymore.

Months went by — 5 months, to be exact — and things were only getting worse. I eventually was kicked out of my own apartment because I couldn't keep up with rent.

Bad was basically confirmed dead. A6d was gone. I lost contact with most my family members. I had nowhere to stay, nowhere to live.

Nowhere to go.

I broke down one night completely. I cried outside in the pouring rain for hours until I made the final decision of ending my life.

14th of June. The day I ended it all.
The day I ran outside in the middle of the night onto the road where a truck led me to my damned demise.

When I died, I remember waking up inside some sort of large hall. In front of me, stood a tall man with a dark red cloak, lustrous crown, long pink hair and some sort of pig-like mask.
He told me, 'welcome to the balance — a place that is neither Heaven nor Hell — I've been expecting your arrival, Zak.'

'Who are you?' I asked. And his response was 'I am who you are thinking. God. God of Blood, and God of the Universe.'

And I remember thinking: *'God, why are you like this? Why are you so cruel? Why have you made humans like me suffer so much? We don't deserve it — I don't deserve it. What have we done to deserve living a life of pain?'*

'To live a life without pain is a life without meaning,' God had replied. 'To be human, you must suffer, same way as you must feel joy. It's all a part of being human, of being my creation.
I've given you all a choice to live your life. The world I've put you in is a world I've created with my bare hands. Will you live together? Or will you live in an anarchy? Peace? Or violence? You define what your life in this universe will be. Not me.'

That God was you. You told me that — you told me all of that. And I was outraged. So I did what no mortal would even dare to do.

I argued back. I argued against God — against *you.* I yelled that you were an awful God. I yelled that you were terrible at handling the universe. I yelled that the world would be better off without having you as God.

I contested your ways of control. I yelled — no, I challenged you — that *I* should be God.

*' Make me God. I'd do a better job than you ever could. I would fix this world, and I would make everything perfect. I would take all pain away and turn this world into a world of happiness and free of suffering. Make me God, and I'll show you.'*

You didn't say a single word, and you sat there, thinking hard. Before smiling under that wretched mask of yours and pointing a finger to my chest.

'Sure,' you said. 'You dare challenge me, a God? Well I accept. I accept your challenge.'

'I'll give you my role as God. But know this, Zak. One way or the other, I am *going* to become God again. Whether it's tomorrow, or in a million years time; whether it's by your own will or by force — I *will become God.* And when I do, you're going to regret ever making this decision. *Do you understand?'*

*'You're wrong,'* I had scoffed back. 'I won't regret a single thing,

and I'll show you. I'll show you that the world *is* better off with me as God. *I will fucking show you!!'*

And so after that, you had snapped your fingers, summoning A6D and Bad beside him in the form of 'assistants'.

'Wondered where they were?' you asked me, and you had that awful smile on your face again. 'Vincent and Darryl, should I say? I killed them. I killed them because I knew this would happen. And they'll be your assistants until the end of their time.'

They stayed silent — so did I. And you continued to speak.

'I'll be reincarnating some of my soul into the form of a human on Earth,' is what you told me. 'However, I'll give myself no memory of any of this happening whatsoever. I'll completely wipe all my memory and power. My new identity will be Technoblade. I'll be no more than just a random, powerless mortal on Earth.'

*'What will happen to the rest of your soul, then?'*

'It'll be nothing. Or rather, I'll be taking the form of The Spirits. My soul will be diffused around the Universe. The remaining fragments of my leftover soul will be nothing more than particles of the remnants of what I used to be.'

99% of your form, you said, would become human. And the 1% will be particles around the galaxies. Practically nothing.

And before you left, you handed me a small scripture. A Rule Book, with only 5 pages. 5 pages with 5 rules. You also told me:

'Here, I've written a new set of rules for you to obey as God. Since obviously you were originally a human of my creation, you won't have as much power as me. But don't worry, you will still ultimately be the strongest being in the universe. But the only things that will limit you of full potential is this — The Scripts. Don't worry, it's only five rules. It's not like you can break these rules, anyway. Think of them more as a list of what you cannot do. Read them when you're ready.'

And then you vanished, giving me the title and reign as the world's new God. So when I was ready, I read the scripts:

'Rule 1: Assistants cannot be rid. The only way to kill an assistant is by sacrificing their life to save a human, or to change a human's life cycle. Possession is also forbidden here.

Rule 2: Bringing back the dead is forbidden

Rule 3: The only way to crown someone else God is to host Mirai SMP, a murder game starring 15 human contestants to fight to the death until there's one remaining player. The last human standing becomes God.'

... I forgot what Rule 4 was. And Rule 5 was never there, either — the page was torn out. But I didn't have time to question you

about it because by then you had already left.

Then I decided to get to work. It had then just occurred to me that I *became God.* I had *all the power in the world.* I could do anything.

The first thing I did as God was reunite with Vincent and Darryl again. God, I was so happy. We all agreed though that we'd call each other by new names, sorta to symbolise our new future.

Remember how I mentioned that I used to learn code? Well we decided to convert our stage-names to base64, a famous type of ASCII string format. Bad = YmfK, and A6D = YTZk. I called them 'Yimf and Yetz' for short.

Then I got to work. I began to reform the world the way *I* wanted it to be. And I did this for a long time, enjoying myself. Once I became God, I thought I'd finally be able to live happy. To live in peace. To live with completely power and control over the Universe.

... At least, that's what I thought. But eventually, as time stretched, I realised that being God wasn't really all that great. I became miserable, lonely, and bored. I began to feel the same emptiness now as I had felt back when I was human.

Even with Bad and A6d by my side, I still felt hollow. Like something was out of place. The world began to fall out from my hands — out of my control.

Things began to spiral into more chaos.

I realised then that God — You, I mean — were right. I was never meant to be God. Being crowned as God... It was a mistake. I should have listened to you when you said that I'd regret it. I shouldn't have been so arrogant.

I shouldn't have argued against you and challenged you. Because of me, the world was falling apart and I became more depressed than I could *ever* be.

And then I saw — Using abilities that I had no idea I could wield before, I managed to look into a gateway to an alternate reality. A different reality if I *wasn't God.*

All the players in this game were a part of the reality that linked with you, Technoblade. I don't know how, but somehow, you were connected with all of them. Schlatt, Cooper, Joko, Travis... You were connected with them all, in some weird way.

So I decided it was time to put Rule 3 into action. I decided that my time to go was now. I needed to get you to be God again, so you could fix what I done to the world and lead not only you, but these people, into the life they deserved to fulfil.

I hosted the game, and included you and all the other players in it, in hopes that maybe by putting you all in a murder game

together something would happen.
Like maybe if I put you in a game with them all, you'd somehow regain your memories as being God. I thought it would be simple, too — all I needed to happen was you winning the game, and become God. Simple as that.

But it wasn't simple at all. When I hosted the game, someone else ended up winning — Schlatt, to be exact. You ended up coming 2nd place.
You killed yourself.

Obviously, I couldn't afford to let that guy become God. What are the chances that he'd know what would happen?

The rules never stated I wasn't allowed to reverse time if someone were to win. It just stated that in order for them to be God, I had to crown them. So that's what I did — I reversed time back to June 14th. And I repeated the game.

Then someone else entirely won. So I reversed it back and tried again. And I did that, over and over and over, rewinding it over and over until you won. Trying different strategies, different ideas, different pathways.
I tried manipulating you, manipulating other players. But each and every single time I hosted it, someone else had won the game. The closest you've ever gotten was 2nd place that one game on my first try.

I'm not sure if you remember this, but at the beginning of this game, you entered a hospital with Cooper and Travis. Remember that? The hospital reeked of dead bodies, remember? The blood smeared all over the hospital wasn't just any blood — it was the blood of all the players from the previous games.
Their bodies weren't actually there, but for some reason their blood was. I have no idea why, I suppose rewinding time created weird paradoxes...

... But, I'd say in total about every player aside from you had won at least 1000 times. Took about 28,000 attempts until you won — in human years, that'd be more than 2000. But time in this vacuum of space is nonexistent — so it would have taken millenia.

'But didn't you get tired of trying?', you might ask? Yeah. I sure as hell did. In fact, at one point I stopped trying completely. And that attempt ended up leading a6d to his death.

In all my thousands of years repeating the game, not once had my assistant *ever* died. I tried to reverse time after that, but I wasn't able to. I physically am not able to reverse time and revive a spirit. Once you're banished, you're erased from existence. That's just how it works, dude.

And in all my millenia of reversing time, that was the first time

something like that happened. And on top of that, I lost Bad the same game too.

... But I suppose that they too, were also fed up with me trying. Maybe that's why they had suddenly died like that. Maybe they'd also given up, just like me..."

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God takes one more deep breath out, sighing. "Well, that's it. That's the entire story. From start to finish."

Techno is left completely speechless. God laughs nervously.

"Techno...?" he asks him wearily. "Do you... Remember? Has anything I told you rung a bell? *Any bell?"*

Techno parts his lips, before slowly shaking his head. "No... Nothing at all."

He still has absolutely no memory of anything. If anything — this has raised even more questions for him.

If God — No, *Skeppy* — really is telling the truth.. Then that would mean that Technoblade used to be God? And he created this game? But why? *Why did he do that?* Why did he let Skeppy become God if he knew this would happen? *Why did he do any of this?*
It just doesn't make sense. And where's that 1% of him? None of it makes any sense. His head hurts. Why has his head been hurting so much?

Disappointment washes over Skeppy's face, and crestfallen, he removes his mask from his face. His wings vanish, and for the first time his face is revealed.

"Well. I guess that's all." His voice is raspy, and disheartened. His red iris' swirl until they make the colour of chocolate brown. "I did all that I could. I can't do anything else... God, I fucked up big time. All I can hope now is that maybe you'll remember once you become God..."

In his hands, the mask he holds reforms into a different shape, taking the form of a golden crown. Without thinking, Techno finds himself kneeling down before him, as Skeppy holds the crown in his hands.

"Techno, please," he pleads. "*Remember.* Try to *remember. When I crown you God, try to remember, okay?"*

He doesn't say a word; instead, he shuts his eyes tight, and before he knows it, he feels a cold crown place itself over his head.

Instantaneously, Skeppy's body radiates a blinding light, before shattering and diminishing into the depths of space. Techno's eyes snap open, as his pupils merge a glowing white. Angelic wings expand, stretching out from his back as a pig-like mask coils around

his face. His head is empty — until a single phrase appears, written in bold in his mind:

*BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD.*

What does that word mean?

It calls out to him, almost as if the word is begging for him to speak it out. So he does.

*"Blood for the Blood God."*

The world around him swirls. And for the final time, everything goes white.

# || AFTER, PT 2 ||

**(NOTE: Yes, I was mega inspired by SAD-IST's technoblade design for this)**

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Slow claps of applause fill the silence and the white surrounding him. He turns around, finding himself in an empty, white vacuum of nothingness.

Behind him floats a man — the same man he had seen in his series of flashbacks, the one sitting behind all the screens of the players. He has long, braided pink hair, and a pig-like mask with glowing white eyes. He too, is also wearing a royally ancient crown. Who is he?

"Just as I predicted," Techno 2.0 claps. "You'd return again."

*Is he... Me?*

"Who are you?" his voice trembles. Techno 2.0 simply smiles.

"I am the 1%"

*He **is** me. And that's what G— Skeppy had said... The spirits, weren't it? The 1% of the particles diffused around the Universe.*

The ache of his heart silences him from his thoughts; he doesn't have the time to question his 1% further. There's only one thing he wants.

"I don't want it."

Technoblade 2.0 — the 1% of whatever he is — doesn't move. Instead, he murmurs a "what?"

"I don't want it," Techno repeats, his eyes fluttering closed as he shakes his head cautiously. "I don't want to be God... You didn't — *I* didn't — step down from my title as God and hand it over to some random human for nothing, right? If it's true that I really was like you before... Then surely I didn't just give up my life because I just *felt* like it, *right?!"*

With trembling hands, he grabs onto the long-haired, blood God's shoulders, yelling as he drops his crown. "I gave it up because I didn't deserve it, that's why! I'm the *last person* to ever deserve God. A God is meant to care and love for it's creation, right? *So why did I murder so many people with cold blood?* That's—That's not a quality of a true God at *all!!"*

His wavering voice only cracks more under the pressuring burden of his thoughts. Techno2.0 doesn't say anything — instead, he gently takes his hands off his shoulders.

"Who said that?" Techno 2.0 asks casually. "Who defined 'God'? Who ever said a 'God' is meant to love?"

Silence.

"Maybe that's what a God means to you," Techno2.0 smiles again. "And when you become it, I suppose it'll be up to you to choose how you govern the Universe. But I can rest you this — a God is whatever *you* want it to be defined as."

Techno looks up at him with an innocent stare. "Then what do you define as a God?"

Techno 2.0 doesn't hesitate to answer. "I define a God as the opposite of love."

His voice intertwines with a strong feel of confidence. "A God that puts the fate of humans into the hands of the unknown. Their fate is undecided, their dooms are unprotected. A human life means nothing to me. I could obliterate this entire universe within the click of my fingers if I wanted to. I could end the human race if I must. The only thing stopping me is my growing curiosity of the human complex."

A sudden gnawing resentment builds up in Techno as he hears this — *a human life means nothing to him?!* How could he say that. How could anyone say that? What kind of God does he think he is?!

Techno2.0 sighs wistfully, turning around as he paces along the air. "It's amazing, really. How much you've grown. And how much different you are from me compared to back then."

"You're right." Technoblade clenches his fist. "I'm *nothing* like you. Because I *value my people."*

"Do you really?" There's doubt.

"I do," he urges on, "I value them more than myself. And if there's any way I could bring them back — the people I've killed, the people who had died in vain — then I would do it. Even if it *costs me my life."*

Techno2.0 muses, amused. "So you're saying that you're willing to die if it means you can save 14 random low-lives?"

"I don't like how you word that, but yeah."

"... Has my fellow man Zak explained to you the rules?"

"Only the first 3. He forgot the 4th, and according to him the 5th was never there."

Techno2.0 lets out an unpredicted, heartfelt laugh — for the first time, not a ridicule. "Makes sense. Well I can tell you now, Zak had never forgotten any rules."

*What? Then why would he lie about that...?*

"Would you like me to explain the 4th Rule?"

Technoblade nods sheepishly.

"If you can recall, Rule 2 is: Bringing back the dead is forbidden. Rule 4 however is an exception.

Rule 4: There's only one way to contradict Rule 2, in relations to the Mirai SMP. It's possible to revive all the fallen players. And if a God wishes to revive all those players, then they must pay a price.

... They must step down from their place as God. And if a God loses it's title, they will be banished. Forever."

Realisation hits him broadly — no *wonder* Skeppy had lied. Because he knew Techno wouldn't want this. He needed him to become God.

"I'll let you figure out what Rule 5 is later. But for now, I will ask you this: What will be your final decision?" Techno2.0 remarks. It catches him by surprise, and Techno fumbles on his words. His head spins. What's the meaning of this? Of any of this?

"Oh, of course. You still need time to think. I'll wait, then."

"No, I just... I..." his head aches. "I just don't understand. If you knew all of this would happen... Why did you do it? Why did you do any of this?"

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**(THE FOLLOWING WILL BE IN SCRIPT FORMAT TO MAKE THIS EASIER)**

TECHNO2.0: (SMILES) Because I was bored. I wanted to experiment with humans — to play around with my creations. I wanted to see how they would react and act when given the opportunity to become God.

TECHNO2.0: ... But even as a God... I was not expecting *this*.

*TECHNO 2.0 POINTS TO TECHNO*

TECHNO 2.0: You've developed into your own human being without my help. What was meant to be just an unsympathetic, robotic, dumb-down clone of me, ended up developing into a real human being with proper functioning emotions.

TECHNO 2.0: What Skeppy had done to you, with the whole "mind-control", "pushing you in a different direction", and re-analysing your motive — that wasn't corruption. That was actually bringing you back into *me* — turning you back into the being you *really once were*. But somehow you managed to break that chain reaction... So intriguing, humans.

TECHNO: You mean being a cold-blooded murderer was what I was really born to be?

TECHNO2.0: Basically. Oh, you must have been also getting a lot

of frequent migraines on your time on Earth, haven't you?

TECHNO: Yeah. Yeah, I have. How'd you...?

TECHNO2.0: There's an explanation behind that, too. Your headaches occur when the two polar opposite sides of your mind fight against each other — occurring only at the times where you feel most conflicted between what your head and heart tell you. The supposedly 'cold-blooded, merciless' side of you fighting for violence; while the humane, moral side of you is fighting for humanity.

You don't know whether you should kill a human, or keep them alive. It's what led your entire character to be so erratic and unpredictable.

TECHNO 2.0: Sometimes, you'd lash out and turn into a blood-thirsty monster. And other times, you'll save a life simply because you'd feel horrible for letting them die. You were completely unstable.

TECHNO: ... What about in all the other games Skeppy had hosted with me? This wasn't his first attempt... So was I like that before?

TECHNO 2.0: Well all he did was reverse time, nothing too major. So yes, you were always like that. The only difference is that you somehow managed to actually win this time.

TECHNO: ...

TECHNO 2.0: When you had converted to corruption ever since that one encounter with Skeppy, that was when your polar sides had kicked in the most. I don't think you would have experienced much headaches before that.

TECHNO 2.0: ... However, what intrigues me the most... Is that I feel as if I'm talking to an entirely different human right now. Yeah, I created you in my image... But you're so much more different. You're the complete opposite of me.

TECHNO: You mean you never anticipated this outcome?

TECHNO 2.0: Sort of. It's more like I'm just fascinated how you've developed human emotion without any of my help. I've noticed this for a while, actually. Even though I was just mere particles scattered around the universe, I could still analyse you.

TECHNO: So if you were still alive this whole time... Then how come you never revealed yourself until now?

TECHNO 2.0: Well technically, I'm not in my spiritual nor human form. I'm a figment of your imagination, all of this is in your head.

TECHNO: So.. You're not real?

TECHNO 2.0: I am real. Just in your head. But let me finish my story first, otherwise you'll be confused.

*TECHNO: (I already am)*

TECHNO 2.0: When I realised you started to develop feelings, my first assumption was: 'Heh!? Have I done the transferring procedure wrong?' When I transferred some of my cells into the formation of a human being, something must have went wrong in the process for you to have been able to develop human emotions, *riiighhht?*

TECHNO 2.0: ... But then I quickly scratched that off my list. Why? Because its simply impossible. There is absolutely *nothing I could have done wrong.* Because all of my movements and motives are perfect. There is no way anything could have gone wrong during the process.

TECHNO 2.0: So then I wondered for a while, stuck. I wondered deeper into the cycle of human life... And then I had another idea. Maybe you must have been able to gain humanity through the interaction of *other* humans, which then influenced the way *you* acted... But then that also doesn't make sense. Even though the entire point of Mirai SMP was to test an individual's morality. If *anything,* it should have driven you to become even more kill-crazed for the need of survival, *not the opposite.* So I scratched that off, too. And for quite some time, I've been thinking about it hard...

TECHNO 2.0: ... Until I finally got it. **The Law of Polarity.** A fundamental law of the Universe. This is going to get deep, so prepare yourself.

TECHNO 2.0: **The Law of Polarity** states that: "Everything is Dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet." In a basic sense, everything in this universe has an opposite — whether it be left or right, hot or cold, love or hatred — they all have opposites.

And to put that into the context of this scenario, this Law of Polarity took place the second I created an alternate version of myself, which was you. What's annoying was that I didn't even realise it.

TECHNO 2.0: When I cloned you, I cloned you to be the complete opposite of me. To make sure our DNA's wouldn't match, I cloned myself with just barely enough cells to be able to function as a different human being without looking too 'out of place'.

When I put you, the 99% of my soul, on Earth, I had created you in the shape of a 17 year old. Skeppy did the job of allowing you to live there for a little while to adapt to the environment. I also gave you a new identity and made you a 'hitman's assistant'. I purposely did that because I was curious to see if your strength and agility would develop overtime or if it was a natural gift.

TECHNO: And was it?

TECHNO 2.0: A natural gift? Yes, it was. Surprisingly.

TECHNO 2.0: I actually created the agency solely for you. I needed to set you up in an environment that would influence your motives and build your cognition. Hence why you never knew the "boss" of your job. I had to make sure Skeppy would analyse you too as he governed the Universe, because I wanted to see how you'd accustom to your surroundings, since you're technically not human. It was an interesting experiment... However, what I *didn't* think through at the time was what this **Law** would do.

TECHNO 2.0: As God, the Blood God, I am a perfect killing machine. I also hold the most intelligence, power, strategy — everything about me is absolutely perfect. But even as God, I've always lacked something. And that was feeling — *human feeling.* I felt no sympathy towards humans or anyone. Perhaps because they are my own creation. And so, I had always felt lonely as a God.

TECHNO: How come you didn't give yourself assistants, then?

TECHNO 2.0: (SIGHS) You really don't get it, huh? I'm *God, I create everything.* Creating myself friends doesn't feel the same as truly gaining them because *I'm* the one who created them. I could make myself 1000 assistants right now if I wanted to. But what's the point? Of course they'll like me, *I created them.* And because of that, I always lacked what would make a human.. Well, *human.* It's only natural I lacked that.

TECHNO 2.0: So when I created you, I had the perfect image of my outcome in mind. Since I'm perfect, the obvious opposite of perfect would be imperfect. And that would be you. You're imperfect. In other words, a failure... But I had forgotten that I had lacked emotions. Therefore, what I lack, you gain. And what I gain, you lack. **Polar opposites.**

TECHNO: Which means that... *I must have gained humanity.*

TECHNO 2.0: *Bingo!* Somehow, you had gained the sympathy I could never gain. And *that's* why you're human. To *how* I managed to figure that out or make it work, I do not know. But I know now that what I have made wasn't a mistake. It was a miracle.

TECHNO 2.0: And so... In this final stage of a dawn of a new Universe, there's one thing we need to do. We must fuse. I, 1% of you — the creator of this Universe — will fuse my soul with yours. And when we finally fuse together, our qualities will collide.

TECHNO 2.0: As opposites, we must learn to co-exist. We must become one — failure and success — and embrace polarity as a whole. The crux of the **law of polarit**y is to teach us that with every failure lies a possibility to succeed. Thus, all the opposites in this universe complement each other. Rather than us just being two separate halves; we are instead two parts of a whole.
In other words, us together. We'd make the perfect combination.

Us together, we'd *truly be perfect.*

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He scoffs to himself. "Another reason I find humans so interesting. I could go on about philosophy and the rest of the fundamental laws humans have discovered, but that would take eternity. And there's still so much more about the universe that you humans haven't discovered. Your complex only grows, which is what impresses me about my creation. But enough of that, I'm getting sidetracked."

His hollow gaze trails over to Techno's, and as they meet eye contact once again he asks. "Do you have any questions?"

Techno bites his lip. Yes, yes he does. He does have one question he's been meaning to ask.

"Zak... He told me I was connected to them." he begins. "So what was so special about them? Schlatt, Cooper, Joko, Travis, Connor... All the others. What had made them so special? Why did you choose them of all people?"

"Oh, no reason." Techno2.0 responds formally. "Nothing at all. In the end, they were just normal people who had helped you overcome your mental obstacles of your journey to... Well, I suppose becoming Human. They were stepping stones to your fate."

Technoblade falls silent. It looks like he's at a loss for any more words.

Techno2.0 holds out his arm, gesturing Technoblade to kneel down. He quietly does so without obligation, and the God smiles vaguely from underneath his mask. The tips of his fingers brush over his shoulder as he bends down to just above his level.

"Now that I've told you everything you need to know," he speaks, holding out his hand. "I'll say it one more time. Technoblade. What will be the decision you'll choose?

Fuse together with me, and become God of this Universe once again. We'll fix the world together and continue to rule, leaving your dead friends deceased for eternity... Or apply Rule 4 to action. Bring back the fallen and give them a second chance of life. By doing so, you'll relinquish your title as God and the future of the world will be unknown."

*It's a decision of life or death.*

Is he willing to give it all up just to save 14 random people? 14 random humans? Who mean nothing to God?

... ...

No. They aren't just random people.

They might be to himself — the 1% — but not to him. And as long as if they don't become one, he's his own individual. He's his own person. And he has a choice.

*Poke, Sneeg, Carson, Ted. Wilbur, Ryan, Altrive, Ant, Sparklez. Cooper, Travis, Joko, Connor, and Schlatt.*

*They have all defined me. They've made me who I am.*

*Whether I was aware of it or not.*

Poke had taught him to open his eyes to the reality of the situation.

Sneeg had taught him how losing someone close fuels vengeance.

Carson had taught him how to stay bright and joke around even in the darkest of times.

Ted had taught him to realise how quick and easy it is to slip into death's hands.

Wilbur Soot had taught him intelligence, and capability of a man.

Ryan had taught him persistence — how far a man is willing to fight until the last of their breath gives out.

Altrive had taught him that hope still exists in anybody.

AntVenom had taught him loyalty, through til his very demise.

Sparklez had taught him what vengeance *felt* like — after shooting his own friend back in the underground parking lot, he had never felt a rage so passionate before.

Cooper taught him how fear can take over someone — how in the end, humans are scared, and afraid.

As corny as it sounds, Travis taught him friendship, and the qualities of having a friend.

Joko had taught him that humans are capable of love no matter what they do, and how love can drive someone so far they can fall out of line.

Connor had taught him how human people are — how they react to death, to people, to strangers.

And Schlatt. Schlatt had taught him that no matter your past, you can always change.

These people don't mean nothing to him — they mean *everything* to him. And if there's one thing he knows — he knows that they didn't deserve this. They didn't deserve a fate like this.

Murderers or not, in the end, they're human. They are all human.

And a single life *can* change the world - Skeppy had proved that.

Technoblade closes his eyes. He's settled on his choice.

His pounding heart slows.

His head clears.

He takes off his crown.

# » THE ENDING «

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**15 YEARS LATER**

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The blossoming flowers and youthful trees dance in the gentle breeze of the day; the sun emitting it's blissful, warm rays of joy onto the ceremony; the skies have never looked more bluer. It truly is a special day.

Soft wind blows through his hair, as light leaves speckled in the air frolic around them.

Joko's smile doesn't cease as he gazes into the eyes of the beautiful woman he's about to marry. Amanda.

Her hands are small and soft in his, and the sparkle in her eyes glimmer more than ever before.

In the sitting crowd is everybody he's held close to these past few years of his life — including his family and friends. Those friends being the people he's shared the same experience with — the people who also partook in Mirai SMP.

In between Joko and Amanda, stands a man — the officiant, to be exact — in a suit holding a book on a lectern. A hearty grin curls along his face as he flips to a page. Holding the book open with one hand, and gesturing to Joko with his other, Schlatt announces:

"Do you, Joko, take Amanda to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

Joko smiles. "I do."

"Do you promise to love, honour, and cherish her throughout your lives?"

His eyes gloss over to Amanda's, locking in with hers. "I do."

"Do you promise to respect, comfort, and keep her, in sickness and in health?"

His sapphire eyes glisten. "I do."

"Do you promise to share your joys and sorrows, and to be faithful to to her alone?"

"I do."

"And do you promise, from this day forward, to have and to hold her til death do you part?"

He squeezes her hand, and allows his voice to soften. "I do."

And as he gazes at her, Schlatt asks Amanda the same questions,

to which she also responds the same way.

Once she finishes, Joko lets go of her hand, and his fingers trail over to the small cushion with the ring, in which the ring bearer is holding. The ring bearer is just a young boy, who is Amanda's youngest cousin. As he picks up the ring with a gentle hand, he slides it onto Amanda's finger as he says, "I give you this ring as a symbol of my everlasting love for you."

The ring slides on neatly, and Schlatt closes his book to pronounce their marriage.

"It now my honour that I pronounce you, husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride!"

They kiss. Cheers and applause echoes throughout the crowd.

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"What a wedding that was, huh?"

Cooper smirks, taking a sip of his drink as he leans against the porch's fence. His hair dances swiftly in the breeze of the afternoon wind.

"About time, too." Altrive sighs. "Haven't they been together for like, 10 years?"

"Yeah, talk about a slow-burn." Cooper laughs, "And isn't...— Wait... Travis... Are you *crying?"*

The two boys smile at Travis, whose been making muffled sniffs this entire time.

"N-No!" he utters, wiping his eyes.

Altrive shrugs casually. "I think you are."

"No I'm not, shut up! I— I just have really bad... hayfever."

Cooper chuckles, smacking his hand on his friend's shoulder. "You're totally crying."

Travis's arms shoot up, admitting defeat. "Okay, fine! I am crying! I... I'm just *so happy for them!* Joko always told me how long he's waited for this day and it's finally happening and I just love them both so much IloveAmandaandJokosomuchA*GHH THIS IS THE BEST DAY EVER!!"*

He finds himself smiling at his friends frankly wholesome reaction. "You know, Joko made the right choice making you his best man."

Both Altrive and Travis send a blank glance in his direction. Softly, Travis murmurs to him, fidgeting with his sleeve.

"You really think so?"

" 'Course I do," Cooper says, throwing his arms up. "Dude, I think you might be more happier about the wedding than Joko is!"

Chuckling, Altrive nods, turning to Travis. "Yeah bro, you're acting like you're the one marrying Amanda. You should be the

groom instead."

"No way, *seriously?!"*

"Mr Steal-Your-Woman?" Cooper asks.

"More like Mr Steal-Your-Wife."

The three are laughing now, joking around as Travis tries to defend himself. "C'mon guys, you know I'd never do that!"

Out of nowhere, a boy with dark, slicked back hair walks in from behind the trio, holding a glass of punch in his hand.
"Oh my god, who made this punch?" he remarks, joining the group of chuckling boys beside them. "It's awesome!"

"I agree," Travis nods, recovering from the fit a little quicker than the others, "the punch is delicious!"

As Altrive wipes his eye with his sleeve, he turns to the boy, before jumping up and exclaiming.

"'Sup Ry!" he gives him a fist-bump.
Ryan smiles back, bumping him. "Hey man!"

"I think it was Connor who made it." Cooper muses, looking into his almost-empty glass of punch. Ryan wasn't lying, it was quite good. "Dunno though, he doesn't really look like the punch-type."

Travis shrugs. "Life's full of surprises, right?"

"POGGERS! Connor of all people made this?" Ryan utters, baffled. Quickly, he runs over to the ledge of the porch, leaning on the rails as his eyes dart from left-to-right across the view. "I gotta go thank him! Where— Where is he now?!"

"I think he's over by the fountain with Ant and Wilbur," Altrive nods his head over to the far right. Over in the distance, are three boys chilling by the water fountain, near the exit to the Wedding Venue. Without hesitation, Ryan throws his empty plastic cup on the ground, and jumps over the barriers as he yells out "HEY CONNOR!"

"Wait!" Altrive exclaims, also heaving himself up over the fence. "Ryan! Don't leave me! *WAIT FOR ME!"*

He runs after his friend, leaving Cooper and Travis alone on the porch together. A few seconds of silence passes before Cooper slumps. "Oh wait, oops."

"What is it?" Travis tilts his head.

Cooper facepalms. "I just remembered, it was actually *Ted* who made the punch."

Travis lets out a soft chuckle. "Poor Connor! He's gonna be so confused then. Are you gonna tell them?"

Cooper chuckles a little, shaking his head as he turns to Travis. "Nah, I'll let Connor have his fun. That dumbass is gonna probably drunk so he'll play along with it anyway."

Suddenly, he hears a loud splash, followed by laughs. Travis

answers his question before he can even ask.

"Did... Connor just fall into the fountain?"

*Yep, drunk.*

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"You mean you haven't played all your songs yet?" AntVenom queries. After the main ceremony ended, Wilbur, Ant and Connor found themselves hanging out together by the water fountain for the after party.

"Nope." Wilbur smiles. "I still got one more. You know, saving the best for last. It's an original song I wrote just for this day!"

Two arms wraps around Wilbur's neck, and he jumps in surprise.

"Heyyyyy Wil~!" Connor exclaims, his words slurred as he drops his cup on the ground, "*why don't you let meEee play your guitArRRr?! ~~"*

"Woah, Connor, slow on the drinks dude," Ant grimaces. "How many have—"

"No way that's happening!" Wilbur's exclaims interject Ant mid-sentence, as he shakes the boy off him. "Remember *last time* I let you play on my guitar?"

"UhhHHhh... No."

Ant scratches the back of his head, anxious. "I have a feeling I'll regret asking this but... What exactly *happened?"*

Wilbur opens his mouth to reply, when another voice from behind cuts him off instead.

"He stripped off his shirt, ripped off its sleeves and tied it around his head, while head-banging and smashing the guitar on some random kids head before drop kicking him onto a table right in the middle of a couple's fish-and-chips dinner."

Behind Wilbur emerges a man rolling his eyes in a suit and tie, holding a wine glass in his left hand.

"Sneeg!" Wilbur and Ant exclaim in sync. Beside SneegSnag, is two other men talking amongst themselves — Poke, his best friend, and Captain Sparklez.

"I did *not* do that!" Connor dazedly jabs a finger at Sneeg.

"Yeah you did, and you were drunk as fuck. It was actually hilarious, I watched it all happen. I even took a video of it!"

"A video?!" they all exclaim, and Sneeg gives a smug smirk, like as if he's proud of actually doing that. He whips out his phone, and scrolls through his camera roll; as he does, the group crowds around him, and he plays the video. Everyone but Connor.

"H-Hey, wait," Connor waves his arms out, flushing red as he tries to snatch the phone from Sneeg. His attempts are useless. "Let's uh — r-reconsider this, yeah? How about maybe you don't show them

the—"

A burst of cackles and laughter explode amongst the boys as they watch the video, which only makes Connor flush even more red in embarrassment.

"Holy shit Connor." Ant laughs. "Did that kid get a concussion?"

"Probably. But since when did that happen?" Poke exclaims.

"It was at that one concert Wil did when you couldn't come 'cus you were sick," Sneeg chuckles, handing his phone over to Wilbur to watch, since he was leaning in too close for the others to see the screen.

"Really?! Aw man!"

"You forgot 'creeper'."

"Shut the fuck up Sparklez."

They all laugh at this — it's a small inside joke the gang had. Once the group's fits of laughter calmed down, Poke turns to Wilbur.

"Speakin' of which, yo Wil," he starts, "how's your music career going?"

"It's going awesome." A wide smile grows on his face. "I've performed a few of concerts over the years and released a bunch of hit singles!"

They all congratulate him; comments of 'congrats!', 'that's awesome!' and 'pogchamp's distribute between the friends like a deck of dealt cards.

"Meanwhile I'm over here sitting on my ass all day streaming games on twitch." Sneeg scoffs, making a few chuckle at his remark.

"At least you're not getting bullied by your fans to play Danganronpa." Poke replies, to which Sneeg laughs at.

Wilbur smiles again. "I'm just glad that I managed to get another chance at life to finally fulfil my dreams as a musician, since... Well... You know..."

The group of boys quickly grow quiet, which amazes Wilbur at how suddenly the mood can be changed. He mumbles an 'oh, sorry,' under his breath. However, the silence doesn't last long before Connor's enthusiastic and drunken shouts shatter it like glass.

"Oh my god guys, is that a burrito?!"

He's leaning over the fountain, looking into the water as he stretches his arm out. Panicked, Ant rushes over to him.

"CONNOR NO—"

But it's too late. He falls in, splashing everybody in water. And before they know it, they all go back to bursting with laughter once again.

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Over by the buffet table inside the venue, stands a boy eating a plate full of muffins and fancy desserts alone. Unfazed, he stands silent, watching other groups of people talk to each other as he's consumed by his own thoughts in his head.

It's been 15 years since that day of revival.

*But it's been an eternity since he's ever been human.*

"Hey, Skeppy!"

A cheery voice snaps him from his train of thought, and he turns around. He sees his friend waving at him, and he puts down his plate of food.

"Bad..?" he murmurs, and his friend runs over to hug him.

"Oh my *god*, doesn't it feel great to be human again?" exclaims a6d, following behind Bad as he takes another chug of his drink.

"Hey, language!" Bad points at him.

"Oh fuck, sorry. Oh my *goodness*,* doesn't it feel—"

"You did that on purpose again! You bad muffin!"

Skeppy chuckles — humans or not, it's always been the same between them. Between the trio.

"Yeah, Vincent." Skeppy folds his arms. "To make up for it, you should tell him how to say Dr Pepper in—"

"Don't say it. Don't you *dare* finish that sentence."

...

*I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna finish that sentence.*

"... In french."

"NOOOOOO!!"

More to A6D's dismay, Bad doesn't get the joke. "Wait... How *do* you say it in french?"

A chortling cackle slips from Skeppy's mouth, and he laughs as the two friends continue to argue.

Another wave of gratitude washes over him; and he's reminded of how thankful he is to live again.

He didn't know what to have expected from Technoblade after he became God. But he sure didn't expect this.

He was meant to have been banished for eternity — that was the rule, after all. Give up your title as God, and then banish forever. Banish just like his friends.

But to think that he's standing here on Earth today, as any ordinary human with another given chance at life — it truly surpasses his belief. Which had made him wonder for the past 15 years — what on *earth* did Techno go through to have made all this happen?

He gave up his life to bring them all back, right? But for what? What was his goal behind it? What was it's purpose?

Skeppy glances back at his two friends again, who are still arguing over french. He smiles.

Of course. A lot of things might have changed over the past 15 years, but things like this — like the small moments they all share together — regardless of where they are, things like this have *always, always stayed the same.*

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"So how was I? I made the best officiant, right?"

Schlatt nudges Joko as he says this with a cocky grin on his face. The two are hanging out together inside the main hall, near the buffet.

"Couldn't have chosen a better officiant bro. You grinded out there." Joko smiles back.

A tall man walks up to the two, holding out his arms for a hug. "Hey, congratulations Joko. I'm so proud of you man!"

"Thanks Ted," Joko embraces his friend quickly, before pulling away. "And the punch is awesome, by the way. So thanks x2."

"No need to thank me." His smile is friendly and warm. "I insisted to make the drinks."

Another man jumps in between Ted and Joko, fingergunning the groom dramatically, as he pushes up his glasses.

"Hey Joko, lookin' cute."

"Fucking hell Carson, that's my line!"

Annoyed, Schlatt pushes Carson out the way, clearing his throat. "Hey Joko, lookin' cute."

Joko looks at Schlatt. "Lookin cute... Carson!"

And he quickly turns to look at Carson instead, making Ted chuckle while Schlatt exclaims a 'seriously?!'

"Oh, Ted," Joko suddenly remembers. "Can you check the time for me?"

Ted looks down at his wrist watch, nodding. "The time is... 2:30pm."

"Shit!" Joko mutters, "I have to do my speech now!"

He quickly runs to the stage, as Carson and Schlatt call out "goodluck!" in sync.

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Soon, all the scattered groups around the Wedding ceremony eventually gather up and crowd in the hall. Joko taps the end of his mic, making sure it's working, before clearing his throat as he stands in the middle of the stage..

***It's time now.***

"Hey all," he starts, his eyes moving along the people seated in the crowd. "We've sure come a long way, huh? Well, this speech is gonna be a little different to how Wedding speeches are meant to be. It's gonna be long too, so buckle your seatbelts.

I don't want you all to just think of this day as an average wedding. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for getting the chance to marry the love of my life. But I would have never been able to have this chance if it weren't for what had happened 15 years ago... So, I would like you all to also think of this day as a day of celebration **and** unity.

As you should all may know, on this exact day, the 14th of June precisely 15 years ago, was the day we all shared and gone through an experience that has changed our lives. A... *Traumatic* experience that I can say for a fact, has damaged every one of us in ways that cannot ever *possibly* be fixed.

In no way will we ever be able to forget what had happened. Fear; terror; inhumanity; the things we've gone through — none of that can be forgotten nor repaired. *But,* we can be *rebuilt.*

Our lives — the people we are now — are no longer the same people we were back then.

Throughout these 15 years, we had learned together to let go of the grudges we used to hold against each other in our past, and keep our heads up for the freedom we have been given for our future.

... I'm proud to say that my life now has changed for the better, and if I could go back in time and change anything, I wouldn't.

Because everything I've went through in the past had lead me up to this moment now. I've made new friendships and connections with people I never would have imagined of having. I mean, who would have thought I'd end up being friends with a famous musician and a pirate?"

A few chuckles erupt from the crowd, and he winks at Wilbur and Poke, before returning to his speech.

"Being able to look back over it, and comparing my miserable self from the past to now; I've changed. For the better.

I know I can speak for everyone when I say this: When we were all first given a second chance 15 years ago, things were.. more than a *little* awkward between all of us. I won't deny that. I mean, I killed some of you guys. In one way or another, every one of us had been responsible for each others deaths...

*Yet*.. I'm glad to say now that throughout these past 15 years we've shared together, we've all learned to forget our past, and embrace ourselves as new, rebuilt people. I look at you guys and I don't see heartless monsters or cruel murderers. I look at you guys

and I see people. I see friends. And I see family. And I hope you guys see me the same way."

*Applause.*

"With that part out the way, I also want to apologise. I want to apologise to you all for the things I've put you through that I was responsible for. I'm sorry to every single one of you, especially those who died at my hands.

What I've never realised is how strong our connections have grown because of this. And I'm glad that you're all here with me today."

"**Poke**. My number 1 Pirate man. You might have been pirate in your past, but after I got to know you more these past few years, you really grew on me as a person. You're a kind guy at heart, and your sense of humour never fails to brighten up my day.

**Ted**. You were like the dad of the group. I've looked up to you since the very start of these past 15 years, God I can't even believe I had killed you. You're like, the King of dad jokes. And the King of being a good father figure.

**Cooper**. My mans Cooper. Ever since you brought me to that skatepark a couple years back to teach me how to skate, I ended up coming closer to you than I thought. You're funny, witty, chill, and in general just a fuckin' chad bro. I appreciate you lots.

**Sneeg**. I was intimidated by your snarkiness at first. But after getting to really know you, you're definitely not as bad as you seem. You're considerate, super chill, funny, and easy to talk to. All in all, you're a real one dude.

**Sparklez**. The uncle of the group. You were the first one who had forgiven everyone and throughout these years you'd always offer to help us when we needed it. You deserve the world, Sparklez. I'm grateful for you.

**Carson**. Oh man, I sure got a lot to say about you. You're the one who had glued the entire group together — you even gave us all a name. "Lunch Club". You're hilarious, and your jokes are probably better than Ted's (no offense Ted). You're the most caring guy I know... Also, wood fired pizza?

**Wilbur Soot**. The best musician I know. Not only your music is great, but you're honestly such a compassionate and funny guy. And the songs you played at this wedding today were awesome, so thank you for volunteering to do that.

**Altrive**. You're a such bro to talk to. Every time I'm down, you're always there ready to help me out. I appreciate your laid-back, caring company so much dude. I'm forever grateful that we were able to stay in touch man. You're probably one of my closest friends.

**Ryan.** Another friend of mine who I've grown close to over the years. Your always compassionate, and kind, and so fucking caring. I don't think I can ever remember a time where we had a fight. You're an awesome person all in all, Ryan.

**Ant**. By far, the coolest boomer I've ever met. You're like the grandpa who tries to act cool except you actually are cool. You've always been a friendly and nice guy, to both me and the people around you — so thank you.

**Connor**. Another hilarious guy. You're always a thrill to talk to, and you're comedic whether you do it on purpose or not. You have that sorta charm about you, Connor. Something about you just makes you seem witty and charismatic. You're a great friend, my guy.

**Zak, Bad, and a6d.** Or should I say, God, Yimf, and Yetz? Even if you were responsible for holding the game to begin with, I also know that it was thanks to you guys that I am who I am now. And I know how guilty you are still to this day for that. There's no need to regret anything. In the end, it was a thrill to be your friend.

**Travis**. I never deserved you, Trav. I used you in the game and all you've ever given back to me was your forgiveness. You were always nice to me — to *everyone* — even in the game and outside 15 years later. God, I never had a friend as nice or caring as you. So thank you, dude. Thank you for giving me the kindness I never deserved. I learnt a lot about forgiveness and compassion from you.

**Schlatt**. Big S. Schlagg. Bladez. The Man Behind the Slaughter. Fuckin' J for Joe Rogan Schlatt. I want to thank you, for seeing the good in me at the very end. When you had the chance to kill me right then and there you didn't. And the thought that you could have killed me stuck by me all these years. And to think you're also one of my closest friends now is insane — You're a real friend, Schlatt. I mean— You're a real friend, Jschlutt."

He pauses, and there's more applause coming from the crowd. But his speech isn't over yet.

His hands grip tighter around the mic stand. Once the clapping dies down, he takes a deep breath. And he speaks.

"But of course, there's one more person I want to thank. The most important part of this speech — the reason *why* we're all here today:

**Technoblade**.

While he's not physically here with us today, he deserves nothing but our sole gratitude. Love him or hate him, it was because of him that we are still standing here today, given another shot at life.

We're selfish beings — we didn't deserve it. Yet that's not what he saw. I don't know what the hell he saw in us, but whatever it was it gave him more than enough of a reason for him to give up his life

to bring us back to live.

In the end, he had done something none of us could ever do — doing what *he* believed was right for everyone. We all fought for survival — we couldn't help but be selfish for that.

But Technoblade? He won — He became *God.* And he gave up his title for what? To die again?

In the end, he had fought not for himself, but for *us. 14 random strangers. He* ***fought*** *for our* ***future****. . .* And I'm eternally grateful for that.

So, not only this is a day marks the day of me and Amanda's new arc in life, nor our reunion from our past. But it is a day celebrating Technoblade; and the life he gave us all back at the price of his own."

He takes his hand off the mic stand, and reaches over the table beside him. On the table is a glass of wine, and with a delicate hand he coils his fingers around the glass and raises it.

"To Technoblade."

Everybody else smiles, raising their beverage as they clink against each others.

"To Technoblade!" they all cheer.

Technoblade, the man who was given it all — strength, will, determination, power. Was the same man who had chosen to lose it all.

Lose it all for sake of being human. Losing *himself* to find *everyone else.*

Even with his blood-driven, crazed sensation that had taken over him in the halfway mark — his humble subconsciousness had always been there, trying all that it could to break out of the chains of corruption it was shambled to. Even with evil lurking inside of him, was a hidden side of him that wanted none of it. None of power.

And up to until the last few moments, his humane mind had regained itself within him — he had earned back his morality. His true motives were revealed to him. Motives not of eternal power — but of eternal friendship.

Winning to him had meant nothing; holding all the power one could ever possibly have for the Universe — *none of it meant a thing.*

In the end, he had chosen compassion over control. Morality over manipulation.

Heart over head.

Now, their fight had ended. Their futures have been restored, and their lives have been rebuilt.

And with the war finally over...

*They are all free.*

# R̸̛̗̫̰̳̱̗̱̗̱̗

hands. I unfold the tattered paper, and what I see before me is almost unbelievable. In ancient, messy writing, are the words:

***' RULE #5 '***

I almost forgot about that. Of course, the 5 rules in the scripts. How could I have forgotten?

The 5th rule had never been revealed. I thought that it was gone for good — after all, Zak couldn't find the page. So where could it have been this entire time? Wasn't it completely erased from existence? A plot hole that would have never been filled?

But it can't be, because I'm looking at it now. The 5th page of the Scripts. I see the tear mark on the left side of the page, so it's definitely been ripped out. Did I do this on purpose?

I continue reading.

I stop. Everything stops.

***' RULE #5:***

***TECHNOBLADE NEVER DIES. '***

*Technoblade never dies.*

The phrase feels so familiar.

I continue.

*' TO: YOU*

*DID YOU REALLY THINK THAT YOU, A GOD, CAN DIE?*
*OF COURSE NOT.*

*YOU'VE SEEN THE TERM 'BANISHED' APPEAR BEFORE, HAVEN'T YOU? BUT IT'S NEVER BEEN DEFINED.*

*THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING DEAD, AND BEING BANISHED. DEAD IS DEAD, YOUR PHYSICAL BODY IS DESTROYED FOR GOOD AND YOUR SOUL WILL OVERTIME DISINTEGRATE WITH IT. BEING BANISHED HOWEVER DOES NOT KILL YOU. YOUR PHYSICAL BODY DOES NOT DESTROY — JUST DISAPPEAR. YOUR SOUL DOES NOT DISINTEGRATE — IT LIVES ON. BUT YOUR SURROUNDINGS ARE GONE.*

*IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED THIS, THEN THAT MUST MEAN YOU GAVE UP YOUR TITLE AS GOD AND REVIVED THE DEAD.*

*THAT'S TRULY SO INTERESTING.*

*YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING WHY I DID THIS ALL?*

*BECAUSE EVEN AS GOD, MY CURIOSITY DOESN'T CEASE. I WANTED TO TEST HOW FAR I CAN GO.*

*THIS ENTIRE EXPERIMENT WAS REMARKABLE — SELECTING A HUMAN AS GOD, CLONING MYSELF, EVERYTHING.*

*YOU'RE REALLY NOTHING LIKE ME.*

*YOU'RE REALLY, TRULY A HUMAN, TECHNOBLADE.'*

I rub my eyes, half-expecting me to wake up and realise this was just another dream. But when I do open my eyes, I'm still here.

*' ON THE FATEFUL NIGHT WHERE BLOOD CASCADES OVER THE CRESCENT OF THE MOON, YOU CAN RISE AGAIN AND STEP FOOT ON EARTH.*

*AFTER ALL, WHY WOULD I HAVE NAMED MYSELF THE BLOOD GOD? BLOOD IS YOUR STRENGTH. YOU RISE AGAIN ON THE NIGHT OF A BLOOD MOON.*

*YOU CAN MEET THEM AGAIN. YOUR FRIENDS. THEY'RE STILL THERE. '*

My friends?

**... My friends.**

I can see them again. I can really see them again.

*' YOU MUST BE WONDERING: WILL YOU BECOME GOD AGAIN? OR WILL YOU BE A HUMAN? I'LL LET YOU FIND THAT OUT YOURSELF.*

*I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG YOU'VE HAD TO WAIT TO SEE THIS, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A BIT. I WISH YOU LUCK.*

***YOURS TRULY, TECHNOBLADE, THE BLOOD GOD.'***

I put down the piece of paper, but notice something else behind it. I flip it around.

Behind the paper is a picture taped at the back — a picture of a group of guys, smiling as they pose for a photo. I see myself in the middle, my arms around two boys. Schlatt and Travis.

They're all my friends. All my friends from the game.

I clutch the note in my hand, cracking a wide, relieved and grateful smile. I'll finally be free. I'll finally see Earth again.

Behind me, I hear the noise of a door creaking open. I turn around and see a glowing, white door. Wait, I can only return to Earth on the night of a blood moon, right?

That must be tonight.

As I watch the door open, dazed in awe, I can hear it call out to me to enter. This is it, isn't it? From here on out, I don't know what I can expect.

But I'll be alive again, right? I feel a rush of adrenaline course through me — I'm excited for what's to come. This world has nothing on me now — this world can throw anything at me and I'll bounce right back from it.

A thin, stream of tears spill down from my eye as I murmur ever so softly.

*"Not even close, world. Not. Even. Close."*

# EPILOGUE // + AUTHORS NOTE

**RE: CHAPTER 15**

Dear Joko.

If you're reading this, that means that I know you listened to me that night before you left.

I know what you're going through is hard. If it's hard for me, I know it's much more harder for you.

I love you Joko.

I love you so much. I think about you every morning; every day; every night. I can never feel the same without you here beside me. It feels like a part of me has torn and went missing since you left.

Ever since I can't go one day without worrying about you and what you're going through right now. I wish I could have helped you, I wish I could have been by your side. I would have given anything to have been awake that night. Every day, I can't stop living in that regret. I wish I stopped you. I wish I was a better girlfriend.

So please, Joko. If you ever decide to come back I want you to know that I will always be waiting here for you no matter what, and I want you to accept my help. Please. I can't just sit here knowing that the boy I love is out there, somewhere, fighting for his very life.

Even if it means fighting by your side, I don't care. I can't afford to lose you too, not when I had a chance to help. I can't bare to live with guilt like that.

I love you. I won't ever stop loving you. And as much as it hurts me to say this, I think I understand why you left. Because I would do the same. But please. Please just promise me one thing.

Promise me not to die. Promise me you will be safe. Promise me that you will fight and you will get out of here alive, no matter what it takes.

No matter what you do I will always be proud of you Joko. And I know that will never, ever change.

Promise me you'll come back when the game is over. Promise me you'll come back alive and well. Please.

Do it for you. Do it for me. Do it for us, and for our future.

*- Love, Amanda.*

**RE: POST-WINNER**

**DEAR AMANDA**.

I'm sorry I couldn't be alive for you. I'm sorry I couldn't be strong enough. I'm sorry I couldn't come back. I'm sorry for breaking your promise. I'm sorry for not being a good boyfriend. I'm sorry for not proposing to you sooner. I'm sorry for leaving you. I'm sorry I couldn't make it. I'm sorry I couldn't make you proud.

I'm sorry I failed you.

He beat me, Amanda. He beat me and he won, and I won't ever be able to forgive myself for not winning against him. I tried, I really fucking tried. I tried as hard as I could. I had to lie and deceive and murder real, living breathing *people* and I *still* couldn't do it. In the end, it was all for nothing.

God, it stills feels so surreal. I really can't believe I did all that. All those things, that's just not **me.** And even yet, I still couldn't come back home for you.

I'M SORRY FOR LEAVING YOU ON YOUR OWN. IN THE END, I WAS TOO WEAK. I FAILED AND BECAUSE OF THAT I FAILED YOU. I COULDN'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE TO YOU AND I HOPE YOU CAN FIND IT IN YOUR HEART TO FORGIVE ME FOR LETTING YOU DOWN.

AND EVEN THOUGH I BROKE YOUR PROMISE, THERE IS STILL ONE PROMISE THAT I WILL NEVER EVER BREAK: THAT BEING I WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU.

I WILL WATCH YOU FROM ABOVE IN THE FORM OF A SPIRIT, AND I WILL WATCH IN PRIDE. I AM PROUD OF YOU, AMANDA. NOTHING I COULD EVER POSSIBLY HAVE DONE IN THIS GAME WOULD MAKE ME PROUDER THAN HAVING YOU BY MY SIDE. YOU'RE STRONG, STRONGER THAN ME. AND YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT. NO MATTER WHAT.

THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING AMANDA. AND I KNOW YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO HEAR THIS BUT GOD HELP ME IF TECHNOBLADE CAN GET THIS MESSAGE TO YOU SOMEHOW, I'D BE SO FUCKING GRATEFUL AND I WANT YOU TO KNOW.

*I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.*

*I LOVE YOU.*

*I LOVE YOU, ALWAYS.*

- **JOKO.**

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**// AUTHORS NOTE //**

WOO HOO! THATS IT! After over one entire year, I'm so proud to officially announce that MIRAI SMP IS FINALLY OVER! Oh my god, it's such a relief to finally end this - there's nothing more satisfying then to finish a book :D !!

First off, I would just like to say that if you've read this entire story, thank you *so* much. Seriously, thank you so much for taking your time to go through this giant roller coaster ride, to think that there are actually people out there who have read this entire thing is so amazing to me. So tysm for the support and even though there aren't as many of you now as there as at first, ty for reading. I love you all :D <3

It's crazy to think that this is the end of Mirai. This story has been my passion project for more than a year so its both a relief and a shame that it ends here.

Since this is officially over, I'm holding up a QnA! - meaning that you can ask me anything you would like in regards to either Mirai SMP (whether if there are some things you still don't understand, or just facts in general about mirai smp), or facts about myself! I'll answer them all!

You can either ask them in the comments thread on here, DM me, or message me on my message board on my profile - either way will work :D

Now, while Mirai SMP is over, that doesn't mean I'll stop writing fics. In fact... I actually have a brand new MCYT AU fic I'm working on right now!

It's called: OUT! . Unlike Mirai, the story will be focused on more mainstream / currently popular minecraft youtubers (cough, Dream team, etc.). It's a horror / murder story about a group of boys who go to a haunted summer camp. :)

If you could go read it / would like to give support on it, then please feel free to do so! I have already published the prologue on my profile, so if you wanna check it out go ahead!

Anyway, that's all I have really. Again, thank you for reading Mirai SMP, and I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it. :)

Until next time!

**- Youly, signing out!**

**EDIT (25 JULY,2021) !!**

Mirai SMP Prologue is out now !!